# Everybody's

SEPTEMBER 1927

25c

## Outdoor Stories *of* MALAYA CHINA ALASKA *and the* WEST

*By*

Captain Dingle, William Corcoran
Ared White, T. T. Flynn *and others*

EVERYBODY'S

NUMBER 337

WRIGLEY'S is a profitable companion to have with you always.

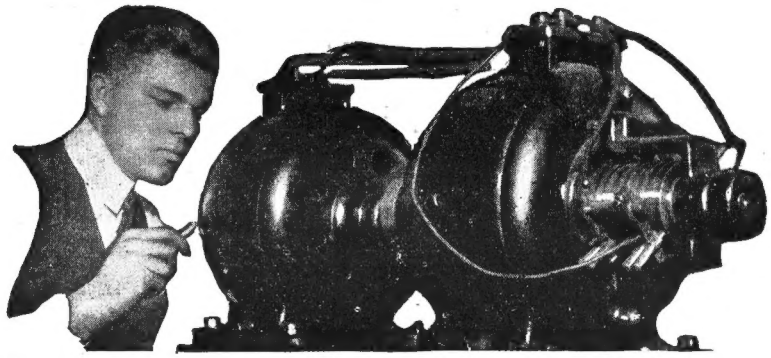
It removes odors from the breath, soothes the mouth and tongue, allays thirst and aids appetite and digestion.

That is a good deal for one sweetmeat to do! WRIGLEY'S does it all!!

It benefits while it pleases—and best of all the cost is small.

*After Every Meal*

H74



# Amazingly Easy Way to get into ELECTRICITY

**Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now . . . and forever . . . say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me teach you how to prepare for positions that lead to $50, $60 and on up to $200 a week in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach that makes you a Real Electrician in 90 days! Getting into electricity is far easier than you imagine!**

## *Learn Without Lessons* in 90 DAYS

LACK of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my astonishing offers. **FREE**

### Employment Service

I will allow your railroad fare to Chicago, and assist you to part time work while training. Then, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained . . . on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled . . . real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations . . . everything from doorbells to farm power and lighting . . . full-sized . . . in full operation every day!

### No Books—No Printed Lessons

No dull books, no baffling charts . . . all real actual work . . . building real batteries . . . winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc., etc. That's a glimpse of how we help to make you a master electrician, teaching you far more than the average ordinary electrician ever knows and fitting you to hold big jobs after graduation.

**Prepare For Jobs Like This**

Here are a few of hundreds of positions open to Coyne-trained men. Our free employment bureau gives you lifetime employment service.

Armature Expert - $100 a Week
Substation Operator - $65 a Week
Auto Electrician $110 a Week
Inventor - - Unlimited
Maintenance Engineer - $150 a Week
Service Station Owner - $200 a Week
Radio Expert - $100 a Week

### Jobs, Pay, Future

Don't worry about a job, Coyne training settles the job question for life. Big demand for Coyne trained men. Our employment department gives you lifetime service. Two weeks after graduation, Clyde F. Hart got a position as electrician with the Great Western Railroad at over $100 a week. That's not unusual. We can point to many Coyne men making up to $600 a month. $60 a week is only the beginning of your opportunity. You can go into radio, battery or automotive electrical business for yourself and make up to $15,000 a year.

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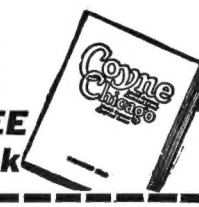
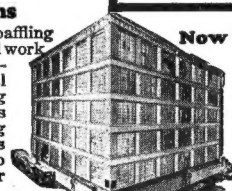
Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 28 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs . . . facts . . . jobs . . . salaries . . . opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

**Get this FREE Book**



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This is our new fireproof, modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars' worth of the newest and most modern Electrical equipment of all kinds. We now have the largest amount of floor space devoted to the exclusive teaching of practical electricity in the world. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

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**500-524 S. PAULINA ST. Founded 1899 CHICAGO, ILL.**

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Address.....

City.....State.....

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E — *Employment Service Placing you in it, or money refunded!*

O. C. MILLER
*Director Extension Work*

## The American School

is the first in the home-study field to recognize the need of guaranteeing its courses with a money-back contract, if the training fails to accomplish the benefits you expect. Thus all risk and doubt are eliminated—**either the training will help you to a better job and a raise in pay or it will cost you nothing.** To better carry out this important service, we maintain a **National** employment department which keeps in touch with the employers of Draftsmen all over the U. S. All this without extra charge to our students and graduates.

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Your offer to send me three lessons free and facts about the opportunities in Drafting and about your course, looks good to me. It is understood I am not obligated in any way in making this request.

*Name* .....

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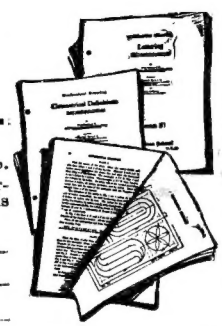
*Occupation* ..... *Age* .....



September, 1927
Vol. LVII No. 3

# Everybody's

OSCAR GRAEVE
*Editor*

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*Headings by Neil O'Keeffe*

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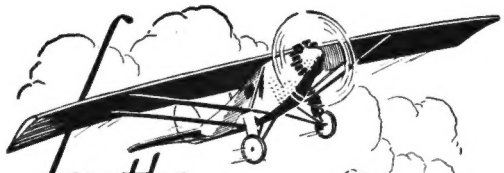

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To you young men of the type that gives to America its Lindberghs and its Chamberlins, the motorcycle has a special appeal. It appealed to Col. Charles Lindbergh, who is a motorcycle enthusiast, and Clarence Chamberlin, who was a Harley-Davidson dealer, because the motorcycle is a spirited mount. It has personality. It inspires clear thinking and clean living. It appeals to red blood, a love for action, a spirit of adventure, a keenness for mighty power under skilled control.

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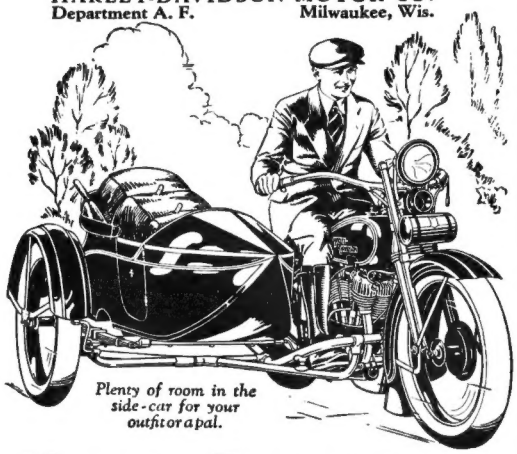

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FATIMA

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"I told him it wasn't too late if he would only make the start and he said he was going to send in one of those I. C. S. coupons right away.

"I hope he does, because an I. C. S. course is the very thing he needs to get out of the rut. I wouldn't be making anywhere near $75 a week if I hadn't started to study just when I did."

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ADVENTURE

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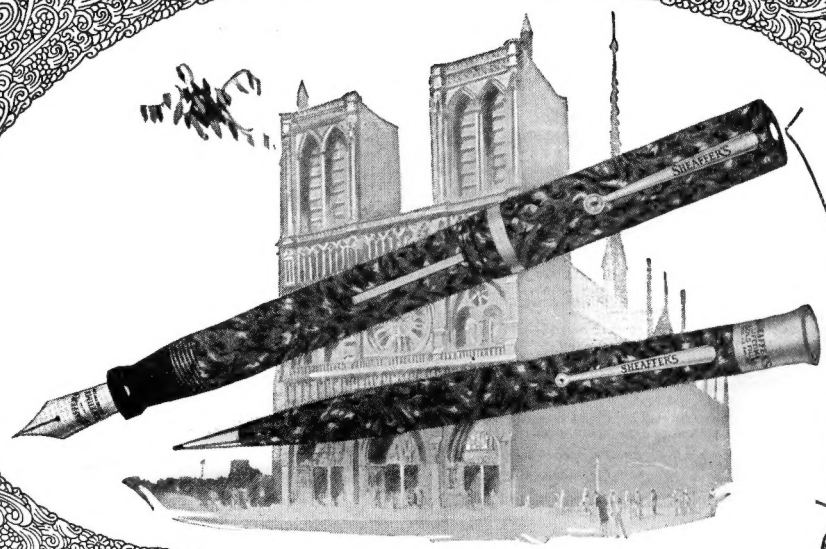


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*Blue Label Leads 15 cents*

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*America's Greatest Home-Study School of Music*
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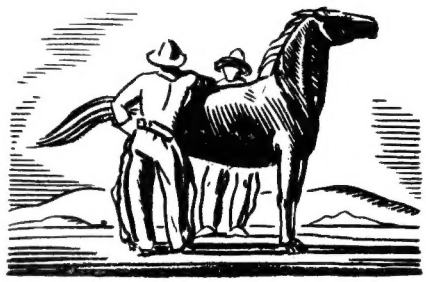

## *Crooked Coin*

A new and ingenious story of the West by W. C. Tuttle. Hashknife and Sleepy, those favorite characters of the cow country, checkmate the villain just when he thinks he's won everything.

*in the* SEPTEMBER 1st **ADVENTURE**

Twice a month - - - 25c a copy

***Look for the facsimile hyphenated name***

# SHE can make it!

## *'course she can!* —*the finest home-made candy* EVER *made*

**and here's how:**

FUDGE CENTER. 1½ cups pure cane sugar; ½ teaspoon creamery butter; 1 cup rich, full cream milk; 1 cup corn syrup; white of one egg.

CARAMEL LAYER: 4 teaspoons creamery butter; 1¼ cups corn syrup; 3 cups rich, full cream milk; ¼ teaspoon salt.

PEANUT LAYER: 3 cups prime No. 1 Spanish whole nuts, roasted in oil (hulls removed).

CHOCOLATE COATING: Melt one pound pure milk chocolate.

Did anything ever taste so good as home-made candy? Nothing but Oh Henry!

And the reason Oh Henry! tastes just like home-made candy, is that it is made on this original home recipe, multiplied thousands of times for the folks who know what's good!—

# Oh Henry!

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H A V E A C A M E L

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BOUNDLESSLY deep is the quality of Camel. Its cool, smooth smoke is as tasty and fragrant, as restful and friendly as an ocean plunge. Modern smokers, educated by experience to the quality of tobaccos, have made Camel their favorite. In worktime and playtime, Camel is the most loyal smoking companion anyone ever had.

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If you don't yet know Camels, you are invited to complete taste satisfaction. Camel is the smoking friend that will never fail. It's first in this modern, particular age.

"*Have a Camel!*"

R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO COMPANY, WINSTON-SALEM, N. C.

© 1927

don't fool yourself

# A tip for office workers

What kind of people do employers like to have around them?

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**⅓ Had Halitosis**

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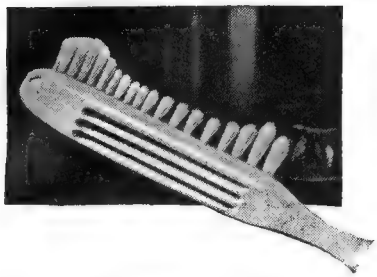

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# *Monsieur Dix*

## *A War Story by a Soldier Who Appreciates War's Futility as Well as its Splendor*

*By* ARED WHITE

THERE was something instantly reassuring in the easy sang froid of the middle aged French lieutenant who came collectedly down into the deep dugout, quite as if he were oblivious to the murderous red tempest of Teuton hate that raged outside. The French officer was scrupulously well groomed, his bright uniform freshly creased, boots, belt and spurs glistening. Battle was no new thing for him, to which he must sacrifice comfort and serenity of soul. His unruffled poise shone in vivid contrast with the air of wracking tension and black despair that just now pervaded the regimental command post.

A pudgy little old man whose haunted brown eyes gleamed feverishly from out of his puffy, flaring red face, upset the map-cluttered table before him as he leaped to his feet at the first glimpse of the French liaison officer. He bustled eagerly forward crying out the thing that had been tormenting him to the point of madness.

"High time you're here," he shouted in his high, piping voice. "What's the orders, man—what's the orders—when do we pull out of this hornet's nest?"

The French officer drew himself up to most respectful and rigid salute and coolly awaited the return of the courtesy in silence.

"Forget that stuff—forget it," fumed the

little man. "What's the orders—quick, man, we're being pounded to pieces here—I'll not have a man left by tomorrow. When—"

The French officer's face remained expressionless. He bowed slightly.

*"Je ne parle pas Anglais, mon Colonel,"* he replied quietly.

"I don't get it," shouted the regimental commander, his impatience mounting. "This is no time for formality. Talk to me in English and tell me what my orders are!"

The French officer, now slightly perturbed at the strange attitude of the American commander, drew himself up in formal salute again. Then he took, without undue haste, from his cloth dispatch-case, a small strip of glossy white pasteboard and handed it to Colonel Blanck with a slight bow.

The colonel snatched the card and turned it over and over in perplexity. It was a card the size of a gentleman's calling card and on it was written in neat high pointed letters *H. Est Dix.* He turned to the French officer furiously, thrusting the card back with an abrupt gesture.

"Confound it, man, I said this is no time for formality. I've been without orders for hours while my men are being pounded to pieces. I want my orders, not your calling card!" the colonel shouted.

The French officer, now sensing the other's outraged humor without remote suspicion of the reason, lifted his shoulders despairingly.

*"Je ne parle pas Anglais, mon Colonel,"* he reiterated deploringly.

Colonel Blanck's face slowly dropped into lines of abject defeat as he fathomed, out of his merest smattering of French, the liaison officer's meaning. A liaison officer at this critical moment who spoke no word of English—and the colonel unable to decipher anything of consequence in French. It was ruin. Worse—it was murder!

"You mean you can't even talk a little English—enough to tell me what time we pull o' this mess—that you got no written orders for us?" he demanded, despair in his voice.

*"Je ne parle pas Anglais, mon Colonel,"* the Frenchman repeated, showing evidence of relief that the meaning of these words, at least, had finally reached the American commander's understanding.

Into Colonel Blanck's tortured mind there flashed a sudden pertinent recollection, the memory of a heaven-inspired provision against such a crisis as this very one. He turned to his adjutant avidly.

"Get Captain Ball here—get him here quick!" he ordered, an unmistakable hope in his querulous voice. "You'll find him with the regimental reserve—vicinity of Point 4453. Have someone take over from him the job I put him at this morning sending bandoleers forward—get him back here on the jump."

COLONEL BLANCK paced silently back and forth across the murky, narrow confines of the dugout. It was the most important thing for him to do in this critical moment when he was hedged in on every side—except the rear—by the monster of black uncertainty; and his nerves were almost out of hand. Never had a man in his reclining years been dragged out of tranquil home in peaceful Army garrison for such a hell of torment as that he had been through since midnight of the night before.

Sleeplessness, exhausting scurryings over long, rough kilometers of his troop positions, snap decisions in the dark based on inadequate information and tortured out of him by dire necessity, the crushing sense of certain impending disaster—these alone were enough to test a younger man whose nerves were of tempered steel. But in the very hour when Colonel Blanck was ready to drop of weariness, when his worn body cried out in vain for rest, the storm had broken in all its blind fury and raged on and on mercilessly with its relentless demands upon his goaded brain.

The Germans had been pounding his regiment with high explosives and drenching his position with poison gas until his one amazement at dawn this hot Monday morning of mid-July had been the survival of a single one of his men. Then the German infantry had come over the Marne in pontoons under cover of artificial fogs, striking him with their overwhelming numbers. All his communications were out. Not a word from the French command until now this gaudy liaison officer had arrived—without a single coherent word on his tongue.

A miracle of miracles it was to the colonel that his men held until now. Cas-

ualties were frightful—twenty percent in some companies—and the hour barely ten o'clock in the morning. That his men held in the face of such a furious German tempest was a thing incredible, wholly unbelievable. It must be that the Germans were gathering themselves, waiting to strike some crafty, sweeping, devastating final blow that would demolish his whole regiment in this, its very first battle.

The military situation in France was this:

The Prussian army had resumed its titanic drive on Paris. For a month the Germans had been gathering themselves, re-constructing their best shock divisions, moving up their most potent engines of destruction for another savage lunge at Paris. A month of rest for the Prussian Frankenstein after its red drive from the north that had plowed its desolation through the British lines, swept the French from the Chemin-des-Dames, leaped the Vesle and brought up at the Marne. At the peep of dawn—4:35 o'clock this morning, the German shock had been delivered in all its devilish fury along the line ranging from Château Thierry to Main-de-Massignes, which is east from Rheims. The Germans had thrown a heavy force across the Marne to the east of Château Thierry with the plan of driving the main blow down the valley of the Marne, right through the Americans, seize Paris—and offer the world a German peace!

"Hold!" That was the American order from the indomitable American field leader, Liggett. It had gone the length and breadth of his command. Hold. Hold at any cost! America's First Corps was finally under American tactical command. Withdrawal of American Divisions would be only at American command. Such American troops as now remained with the war-weary French Divisions would withdraw only on French orders. Not at their own discretion. If the German push was to be stopped, it could only be stopped by holding the line against them.

Colonel Blanck had gotten these instructions unmistakably. The night before, an unusually quiet Sunday night, an American staff officer had brought him the word that the German main effort might be launched at any time. Perhaps that very night. Surely within a week. Prisoners had betrayed the German plan. And the colonel must hold until he got definite orders from either French or American headquarters. Being attached to the French division on his left, he would accept the orders of its commander. The nearest American troops would be some kilometers farther along the Marne and out of immediate touch with his position.

And through the unspeakable hours of the resistlessly savage German hurricane, not a word had reached him. Not a word even though human endurance could not hold up against the untempered fury that had broke upon him with the dawn. He would do well to hold on until darkness brought its merciful cloak for hurried withdrawal of the shattered remnant of his regiment. And he must know the hour and plan of tonight's certain withdrawal, else how was he to work out the detailed orders for his battalions to extricate themselves from this fatal trap?

Captain Ball, regimental supply officer, came jolting in out of the howling hurricane, gasping for breath. He was a very large young man whose heavy body, favoring him at football in college days, had relegated him to the supply company because of overweight while smaller men were favored with command on the fighting line. Sleepless days and nights of frantic activity at this unaccustomed task of filling thirty-six hundred healthy stomachs day in and day out in this tangled wilderness of the front had wrought havoc with him. His olive drab uniform which had fitted him snugly two weeks ago now hung on him in shapeless folds. But above the misery of pallid face, bloodshot, staring eyes and sagging shoulders, there shone an unmistakable determination—the dogged determination of a groggy boxer to hang on at any cost so long as there was life left in his buffeted soul. He had imbibed of the fighting spirit of the American Expeditionary Forces. The captain saluted nervously as he stood before his highly agitated colonel.

"Captain—my orders to you were to learn to talk French—did you obey them? Are you able to function now?" fumed the colonel, half in accusation, half in question.

"Yes sir—I—I been studying French ever since you told me to, sir," replied the supply officer, visibly relieved that he was not again on the regimental carpet for neglect of some unsuspected duty. "I bought

a book, 'French Made Easy,' sir—and studied it clear through."

Colonel Blanck's face brightened momentarily. "Thank heaven!" he exclaimed. "You are the one hope of this regiment. That Frenchman there is here with our orders. But he can't speak a word of English—get 'em out of him and work fast!"

The colonel indicated the liaison officer whose face alternately registered polite interest and nettled impatience at the conduct of these strange Americans.

CAPTAIN BALL turned to the liaison officer with the uncertain air of an unaccustomed student about to essay an intricate test problem in trigonometry or calculus. *"Bon joor, monsier,"* he began nervously by way of making a start. *"Commez voo portay voo."*

The liaison officer saluted, bowed slightly again and handed Captain Ball the small white calling card that Colonel Blanck so abruptly had returned to him a few moments before. The captain studied the card uncertainly, laid it on the colonel's table which had been set upright again by the diligent adjutant, and extended his hand in greeting.

"Sorry I haven't got my own card with me," he said apologetically, losing his bearings entirely for the moment in the memory that the French were to be treated with the utmost courtesy at all times. "My name's Captain Ball and I'm glad to meet you Monsieur Dix," he added more easily.

Colonel Blanck broke in sharply, the strain of this outrageous interchange of needless courtesies too great for his patience in this desperate moment when every second of time was priceless.

"Cut out all this Alphonse stuff, Ball," he roared. "Didn't I tell you to begin with that he don't speak a word of English? Say what you got to say to him in French—and say it fast!"

Captain Ball gave an unhappy nod of acquiescence to his overwrought colonel and turned doggedly back to his task of reducing the precious French orders into English.

*"Je—je swee enchanty—dee fair voter connoissance,"* he stammered, striving to establish a foundation. *"Kel—Kell—?"*

The French officer broke in and spoke at some length, gesticulating eloquently with his hands, shrugging his shoulders and rolling his eyes in emphasis of his words. One word that he repeated out of the babel many times finally reached the captain's understanding.

"I got a word," exclaimed the captain, turning to the regimental commander. "I got the word *'part-eel.'* It means—we're withdrawing—sir—pulling out!"

"As I thought—as I thought!" shouted Colonel Blanck, "there's nothing else to do unless they want us all to commit suicide by staying here. But when, Ball, when—that's what we got to know—when—what time—what exact hour! Get it fast—if we're to save a single man. Remember it takes time to work up our withdrawal order!"

Captain Ball set his jaw and turned back to the liaison officer with dogged determination.

*"Monseer, deet maw lee—lee—"* the captain spluttered painfully, groping fruitlessly for the vital word. Finally he turned in despair to the headquarters staff.

"What's the—the French word for 'hour'?" he asked pathetically. "I never had that—that word in my studies. I'm trying to find out the hour for withdrawal and then I can verify what he says."

The colonel's impatience bubbled over. "Captain—you were the one who had orders to learn to talk French. Don't ask any of us. We don't know—that's the reason we sent for you. But don't splutter over one word. Get at what he says in some other way—get him to point out the time of withdrawal to you on your wrist watch—or get it any way you want to, but get it and get it quick. We got to know whether we hang on here 'till midnight or pull out of the hole by dusk."

The supply officer groped his way back into the uncertain realms of the French language. He tried phrase after phrase in vain. He held up his wrist watch finally, as the colonel had suggested, and pointed to the hands. The French officer smiled in quick understanding, glanced at his own watch and nodded his approval that the captain's watch was properly synchronized with the official French time. Both watches showed the hour to be exactly seventeen minutes after 10 o'clock of this unspeakably horrible July morning. Captain Ball, groaning inwardly that even the sign language failed to disclose the hour, mopped his brow with a grimy hand and stubbornly

stammered on with every French phrase that he could conjure up.

*"Kel tonn—kel 'lic-tic'—nous part-eel d' easee?"* he repeated with futile gesticulations.

The French liaison officer, the very picture of alert and patient attention, finally lifted his shoulders and his eyebrows in complete surrender.

*"Je ne comprends pas Anglais, mon Capitain,"* he announced, a slight note of irritation in his voice.

"What was that—what was that he said then—it sounded familiar—like something important—give it to me as fast as he says it—every second is precious," broke in the colonel, impatiently.

The helpless interpreter turned to his regimental commander with a groan of despair.

"Oh, sir," he cried, "I spoke to him in French, sir,—all my French—my very best French and all he says back, sir, is he can't understand English. He don't even seem to get it into his head that I'm trying to talk French to him, sir!"

Colonel Blanck, seeking refuge again in an animated pacing of the dugout, finally got himself back in hand and brought his native resourcefulness once more to the rescue from this desperate dilemma.

"Get your French book—point out the words to him!" he bellowed suddenly as this fortunate thought came to his mind. "Work fast, Captain—work fast—at least both of you can read French."

The supply officer's legs weaved and he held his feet with an effort. The last vestige of color left his face.

"Sir," he confessed hoarsely, "I—I left my French book in my locker trunk back there in the billeting area—I didn't think I'd have any use for it, sir—up here at the front."

Colonel Blanck held onto himself now only with a masterly effort. His nerves were about gone under the stress of today's red tragedy and it was no longer safe to give passion full play even in venting his passion upon a derelict subordinate. His words came more calmly through clenched teeth as he turned to the captain with a final hope.

"Captain Ball this is serious. Your failure to understand French may—may cost us—our lives. That is—nothing. It may cost us our regiment—it may cost our country frightful reverses. That is—something. Now then! You've got to get it out of him some way or other. Write the words—do it in your own way but—"

HE WAS interrupted by the abrupt entrance of a small, trim young officer who commanded the colonel's left battalion in the defensive line overlooking the Marne and connecting with the French right. The officer was alert and keen eyed. The crisis of battle that had followed sleepless nights and days of furious exertion had drawn lightly upon the reserves of healthy youth. But in the taut lines of his bronzed, lean face there was the hint of disaster. The young major spoke with precision.

"Sir," he said in a constrained, vibrant voice, "the French battalions on our left have vanished in thin air and left my flank clear up in the air. I've got to have support or the boche will hit us in flank and rear! I need two rifle companies from the reserve."

A violent trembling of the dugout, as from an earthquake, accented the major's portentous words as a German heavy shell crashed close to the command post. Its hideous detonation roared menacingly above the ceaseless growling of small cannon, minnenwurfers, hand grenades and musketry that had surcharged the warm July air with savage din since long before the first flush of dawn.

Colonel Blanck turned to face this new tragedy, still holding on to himself grimly. "You—mean," he gasped at the end of an interminable period of gaping indecision, "that the French have pulled out and left us alone in this—this death trap—to die like rats?"

"Sir, all I know is that the French pulled out suddenly at about ten o'clock from my left," replied the major, losing none of his equanimity. "I am no longer getting any support from their artillery. Our men have been holding tight, sir, and with a couple of rifle companies to cover our left, I do not regard our situation as critical at present. But I must have support!"

The regimental commander turned dazedly towards the exit of the command post. "I—I got to see for myself," he complained. "I—I want to die with my regiment if we're left in a trap to die like rats. Oh, why did American headquarters force me

to wait on orders from the French—why didn't they let me use my own judgment. We'd been out of this before daylight."

He paused in sudden recollection at the exit of the dugout and turned upon the wretched Captain Ball with an almost hysterical outburst of passion.

"You—you get that translation out of that Frenchman—before I get back," he stormed. "If you fail—drag him all over the French lines, wherever they are, until you find someone that can give us the orders. I'm holding you—you—strictly responsible for what happens from now on! We've got to have those orders."

As he groped his way out into the open, where the warm beauty of a July day had been distorted into a ghastly, belching inferno of human hate, Colonel Blanck drew himself gradually erect, quite as if the ordeal of facing the shrieking, hissing deaths about him rallied his overwrought nerves.

"Sir, may I suggest you send one of your staff officers," protested the battalion commander. "It is a needless exposure for the Colonel, sir, and I can make the situation quite clear to a staff officer who can bring you back the information, sir."

Colonel Blanck sniffed contemptuously. "Lead out, Major," he snapped. "The situation is desperate enough without wasting time talking about it here."

The colonel barely glanced at the ominous spray of earth and rock that rained over his steel helmet from a nearby shellburst. He hurried along beside the young major, now far more collected and possessed of himself than he had been in the dugout. He had been trained to sneer at the threat of death and he was true to that training. Physical fear was not a thing to bother Colonel Blanck. It was the uncertainties of his tremendous new responsibilities that wracked his soul, his inability to readjust himself to a war that outraged every vital principle he had been taught to hold sacred.

From the placid command of a garrison of two hundred men, chiefly engaged in fatigue duty at a small western post, he had been suddenly transplanted, despite his late fifties, to the active front line command of thirty-six hundred rookies—mere civilian schoolboys and clerks and farm hands except for their uniforms into which they had been most hurriedly fitted to meet their country's dire emergency. And before they were really ready to emerge from the awkward squad—the whole lot of them, including non-coms, lieutenants, even company commanders—here they were being rushed in to pit their raw inexperience against the deadly efficiency of war-seasoned Prussian veterans. All of his experience, all of his training of a lifetime in the carefully charted profession of arms, cried out against this wanton murder of his countrymen. And now, here he was actually face to face with the crash—even detached from promixity to his own division command, brigaded with the French who seemed to have pulled out, suddenly leaving him to be struck in flank and rear. Disgrace and disaster could be the only outcome.

The young major guided him swiftly down a shallow ravine and, by means of careful detours, kept to the cover of dwarfed pine in mounting gradually to a protected eminence that overlooked the battle dispositions on the left of the line. There was a lull in the firing in their immediate front, the fury of the battle's passion centering itself farther down the river where the Germans just now must be desperately attempting to blast their way through the granite wall of young Americans that secured the valley of the Marne and closed the gateway that led to Meaux and Paris.

Below them lay the heavy, swift Marne, its waters alternately flashing in the sunlight and obscuring itself in the hazy remnants of the greasy artificial fog that the Germans laid down to cover the movement of their fighting men across the river in boats. A heavy funereal smudge swept across the broad valley beyond the river, marring the simple rustic beauty of alternating small orchards, vineyards, pastures and villages. Flashing splotches of vivid black and white, shrieking their momentary martial glory with a hideous clamor that awakened echoes of mortal anguish below, flecked the whole heavens; springing into shape as from some demon's wand, then quickly fading into smudgy wisps that drifted lazily away to merge with the endless streamers of Teuton crêpe that the Kaiser was shaping for the front door of civilization.

The battalion commander pointed out his battle dispositions tersely. His men were arranged in shallow squad trenches

so as to effectively command with their fire the eighty-meter reaches of the canalized Marne at this point. They had been able to drive back every determined German assault this morning, overcoming superiority of numbers with superiority of firing nerves at short range—superiority of stamina in the grapple. When the Teutons had come on in stubborn waves, yelling and brandishing their bayonets, the Americans had only yelled back in derision, fighting them with their bayonets, with clubbed rifles, even with their fists. They had refused to give ground—where they had been ordered back a few meters for a better position, they would hold the new position with the same unyielding determination. Even the wounded fought. Desperately hurt men had refused evacuation. The order was to hold—and as long as there was a man left, that man was going to hold!

"IF I can only have two more companies to cover my left flank I can hold here until night comes on to help us—or until we are reinforced," said the battalion commander with confidence in his voice. "Come, I want the Colonel to see the exact situation over there on our extreme left."

They made a short detour to another rise a few hundred meters to the left and mounted another sharp rise. "I've started pulling in my line to hold this ridge," expounded the major as they came to the crest. "The terrain so favors us that with two more companies from the reserve I can hold—"

He broke off the sentence with a sharp gasp and stood staring down the slope. Colonel Blanck was arrested with his field glasses half poised by the breathless spectacle before him which caught his eyes at the same moment. At the edge of a scrub clump at the neck of a narrow swale not a hundred meters distant there was being enacted a strange drama. A lone American infantryman, bayonet poised, stood desperately at bay against the better part of a German platoon that pressed him closely from just beyond the point of his reeking bayonet.

The tactics of the Germans were perplexing. The infantryman was a ready target but the boche grenadiers made no effort to shoot him. Two or three Germans with fixed bayonets would approach him in front and parry his bayonet thrusts while others closed in on his sides in an effort to grapple with him. A German officer, pistol in hand, stood hard by directing the activities of his men.

Another German rush was beaten off by the lone infantryman who defended his front and flank with short sharp determined attacks that sent the Germans scurrying out of reach of his bayonet. Several of their number lay in the clearing, mute evidence of his unyielding prowess. The German officer now gave guttural instructions for a new kind of assault whereat an agile German suddenly clubbed his rifle and with an adept smashing swing snapped the American's bayonet blade. There was a howl of glee from the German patrol.

"They're trying to take him prisoner," cried the major. "My God, they must have sensed that our left flank has been left up in the air by the French and are out right now feeling for the place to hit us in force. They want that man alive at any cost to get information out of him."

Colonel Blanck swore despairingly. "How did the abominable chump get out there," he wailed. "Don't he know that if they capture him they'll make him talk and we'll be wrecked before there's a chance to withdraw a single battalion!"

"No, sir," protested the major. "He was sent out there with a small holding force to cover the adjustment of our lines on this flank. We had to do it sir—and he's sure holding!"

"But if they get him to talking!" retorted the colonel furiously.

"They'll never get him in the first place and the most they'd get out of him if they did would be his private opinion of the Kaiser," said the major intently.

"You can't tell what a rooky'll do," complained the colonel. "You can't ever tell what—"

He broke off at the spectacle of a sudden furious forward rush of the German patrol. But the American doughboy swiftly clubbed his rifle and swung it defiantly at his tormentors. He was a tall, wiry, gangling youth of perhaps twenty, and the colonel's practiced eye saw even amid the excitement of the moment that his thick red hair was uncut and unkempt, billowing over his eyes at times so that he was forced to waste an occasional pre-

cious moment brushing it back out of his face. It flashed into his mind out of the habit of years that someone had been negligent in permitting this man's hair to grow. Someone had failed at company inspection. There should have been a period of kitchen police or other disciplinary action for such an offense as this.

The sharp commands of platoon commanders reached his ears. He made out that his officers were shouting their men back into their rifle trenches as they sought to flock out to the rescue of their lone comrade. The level-headedness of these platoon commanders gave him an instant's satisfaction. Such an effort at rescue could only lead to a dangerous and costly feud into which both sides would throw themselves without serving any good military purpose. After the red losses of the day and the black responsibility of holding on until withdrawn, there was no sacrifice of life that could be made to sentiment. That lone infantryman must pay the full price of his service unless he could work out his own escape in some miraculous way.

Again the soldier beat off the Germans with his clubbed rifle, smashing two incautious Teuton heads that approached too closely and narrowly missing a third. The boche fell back for parley and the German officer now approached alone, pistol in hand. As he came within a few paces of the private he leveled the weapon. The youth stood looking into its muzzle, his defiance unshaken. Instead of firing, the German officer lowered the weapon. He did this alternately several times, each time taking a step nearer. It was clear now that his purpose was to convince the American of his utter helplessness, of the fact that his only hope of escape lay in surrender.

The German officer had worked his way to within two or three paces and lowered his pistol again when the gangling youngster leaped suddenly forward and felled him with a furious swing of his clubbed rifle. The Teuton went sprawling in a howl of rage and pain. But the blow did not crush his skull. He was on his feet in a moment. He ran forward, infuriated, with leveled pistol and fired several shots in quick succession. The lone infantryman stiffened, took several labored steps to the front and plunged forward on his face, the last spark of life carrying him toward the enemy.

Musketry began crashing now as the combatants on both sides took up the bitter mêlée from cover of their rifle trenches. The air became filled with ominous whisperings and the major discreetly hurried his regimental commander back into the cover of a nearby ravine up which he could make his way to the regimental command post.

"That's the way the men have been behaving ever since the first Germans got across this morning," shouted the battalion commander, a flood of fervent feeling in his voice. "There's not enough boche this side of the Marne to drive them out if I can only support my flank!"

"I've seen—I've seen," exclaimed the colonel. "But this is only your own little local sector, major. There's no telling when we'll be crushed by a German tidal wave. The French have pulled out—and they know their stuff—don't they? If we have to hold until night, I'll give you another company." The colonel groaned aloud at the thought. "But hold your line defensively. At the latest we'll get out of here as soon as it's dark enough to make the getaway. You heard the orders yourself—such as we could make of them! I'll have word back to you as soon as I find out the situation."

COLONEL BLANCK hurried back to his command post. The comparative lull in the storm that now prevailed within his own sector only served to increase his alarm. The Germans must have sensed that open flank on his left and be maneuvering at this moment to crumple him. He feared that reports from patrols would be waiting for him at the command post, telling of an enemy mass movement against that vital flaw in his position. Surely the Germans had discovered ere now that the French Division had pulled stakes.

Fear gripped his heart once more as he left the bullet infested outside and passed into the security of his dugout. He grabbed the reports from his right sector and his combat patrols and read them feverishly. The field wires had been connected up again with his battalions and reserve—but not a word from French or American headquarters.

"They've forgot I'm here," he groaned.

"This quiet just means that the Germans know we're helpless and are closing in on us to wipe us out at one terrible blow."

"The report from the right battalion, sir," said the adjutant more optimistically, "says the Germans have quit trying to send troops across the Marne in boats. The wind blew their last grease fog away and our men sank five boatloads of them with automatics and machine-guns. It was murder, sir, nothing else. Not a boche landed this side. The boche that are over are hugging mighty close under cover and the major over there says he could sweep them into the river if he only got the word."

"That's local—just local," complained the colonel. "You don't think for a minute the boche doesn't know what he's doing, do you—and him with the best trained army in the world? Wait 'till we get hit on our left flank. It'll be a miracle if they wait 'till tomorrow, or even 'till night, to smash us."

He turned to look about the dugout questioningly. "Where's Ball?" he demanded, the mission of that officer being second in importance only to the immediate tactical situation that had developed out of his own brief inspection of the regiment's left flank.

"He's gone, sir," reported the regimental adjutant.

"Gone?" echoed Colonel Blanck. "Gone where?"

"Gone with that French officer, sir. He couldn't make heads or tails out of what the Frenchman said or wrote. The last we saw of him he had the French officer by the arm leading him out of headquarters, sir. We tried to stop him but he said it was your orders and that he'd get the dope translated for you if he had to follow the French Division clear on into Paris, sir."

"If that rascal isn't back here with the full information for our withdrawal within two hours I'll—I'll recommend him for a firing squad," the colonel bellowed. "Shooting'll be too good for—"

He broke off this extravagant threat and turned to the field telephone with an order that he be connected with the regimental reserves. He remembered that against the hour of withdrawal or disaster he must protect that vital left flank even though he was as reluctant to send in those reserves as a cautious man covering a gamble in margins with his last dollar.

"This is 'Pale-face' talking," he told the commander of the reserve battalion, making use of the outlandish code word that designated his regimental command post. "Send two companies under cover to 'Juniper'; put one company in line and hold the other in battalion reserve if you and the major can both agree to that. We're pulling out of here, probably tonight. Don't get involved in any fire fight except in emergency—and remember we're holding defensively until the hour comes to withdraw!"

Colonel Blanck now seated himself at the table and began running a stubby finger over the rear areas. He pulled a pad of paper to him and scribbled notes for use in giving verbal orders to his battalion commanders.

"I can at least work out the mechanics of the withdrawal from this position under cover of darkness," he complained. "All we'll need is a light holding force and then we can pull back to an assembly point in the vicinity of—of—." He groaned again. The assembly point must depend upon whether the withdrawal would be to the north or to the south rear. That was something he could not decide without instructions from that mysterious outside military world of command from which he had heard no tangible word since the fatal order of yesterday that he must hold at all costs until reënforced or ordered to withdraw.

"I'll work out two plans, one covering each direction of withdrawal," he announced, resuming his harried scanning of the map. "It's going to be a mussy job getting this jumble of rooks out of this death trap and once it starts I'll have to put in my time outside untangling the knots."

The field telephone jangled frantically. "Sir, 'Juniper' on the wire and wants the Colonel in person—says it's important," reported the operator.

Colonel Blanck was at the wire at a bound. He tore the headpiece from the operator's ear. News from the left battalion could only be bad news. The grim voice of the major confirmed his worst fears. "Masses of troops moving up on your left rear?" the colonel repeated, dropping his shoulders against the wall of the dugout for support. "See them—through

the trees—two regiments or more—two kilometers away and marching in mass formation—yes, yes—go on—what's the matter—what—!"

His eyes were staring wildly as he turned to his open-mouthed staff. The wire had been shot out on him again. But he had heard enough to confirm his worst fears.

"It's—it's come at last," he said after a long silence in which he grew tragically calm. "We're trapped like sheep in a sinking boat."

A REVERBERATING rumbling added its rending voice to the horror of the crisis. It had the unmistakable sound of a salvo of artillery fired from the fatal left and rear of his own battle lines. There was another salvo and another, as of a battalion or regiment of artillery laying down fire by battery. As the third salvo shook the command post there was no longer any mistaking the certain direction whence came the ominous sound. The others in the dugout confirmed the omen by their stark faces. Colonel Blanck with fine deliberation drew on his pistol belt, steel helmet and gas mask with a hand that no longer trembled. The crisis was at hand. It meant the end.

"Quite as I expected," he said with the calm resignation of a brave man facing certain doom. "Even the German artillery is now behind us. We're done, gentlemen, as you can see—as I saw some hours ago. But I shall not suffer the humiliation of being made a prisoner of war." He looked from one to the other somberly and added, "You may all remain here if you wish until you are taken prisoners. It is the sane thing for you to do. I shall go out and die with my men."

Colonel Blanck turned slowly but firmly up the steps of the dugout, mounting to the exit with a magnificent poise and dignity. The regimental staff, even the clerk, operators and orderlies, swept by his heroic example, began seizing their equipment to follow. They could sneer at death as well as he. But at the instant when Colonel Blanck was emerging from the upper door of the command post into the fatal world beyond, a bulky, fast-moving figure was turning in at the same door. The two collided violently.

"Colonel Blanck!" exclaimed the other. He wore the insignia of a lieutenant colonel of the general staff. "Sure glad to find you here!"

"Smith!" gasped the colonel, at sight of this sudden apparition from headquarters. The two had served together as major and captain a year ago at a sleepy border garrison. "It's no fault of headquarters that you find me here or anywhere else," he added, significantly.

"We didn't know until an hour ago that you'd ignored the French orders to withdraw—then we found it out from a French liaison officer who seemed quite huffy about it," the other spoke up.

Colonel Blanck looked at him sharply. The staff officer's face was fairly beaming. He appeared anything but a harbinger of ill tidings. Could it be that he was gloating at this stroke of ill fortune of his old battalion commander!

"What are you doing here at such a time as this?" he demanded abruptly.

"I came up to let you know the general is tickled pink with you," the staff officer effused. "He was afraid you'd be nervous after having disregarded the French orders."

"Disregarded orders!" echoed Colonel Blanck. "I got no orders that I know anything about." His face hardened and he pointed a menacing finger to the northwest. "Do you hear that uproar—do you know what's going on at this minute on my left flank and rear! Do you know—"

"Sure, I know all about it," smiled the lieutenant colonel. "Those French started coming back an hour ago when they found out you were holding. They'll not only have their whole division on your left in another hour but they've shot in an extra regiment of field guns and some dragoons for good measure. But it's you that's saved the day up here!"

Colonel Blanck, recoiling involuntarily a pace, nearly lost his footing on the top step of the dugout. The staff officer's quick arm kept him from tumbling down the steep steps. The whole thing had struck him precipitately. That was French artillery in his rear. Those were French troops coming back on his left and rear. That must have been what "Juniper," his left battalion, was in the act of reporting when the wire went out.

"It took pluck, man, to take such a chance after you got your orders," the staff officer went on, clapping his senior

admiringly on the shoulder. "It might have cost you a general court though, if things had gone wrong."

"Pluck—I'm telling you I got no orders from the French Division," responded the colonel, natural caution rising above the sudden joy of learning that his left flank was not gone after all. He was not trusting even his friend, Smith, too far. The general staff sometimes changes men strangely, he remembered; and he never had wilfully disobeyed an order in his life.

"Tell it to the marines," the other bantered him. "You needn't be so conservative. The French were quite put out about it for a time—said they gave you your orders in writing and you tossed them aside and sneered at the liaison officer—"

"Orders in writing—I've never seen a scrap of an order, I tell you," fumed Colonel Blanck, aroused by the blank injustice of the charge. "There was a liaison officer here—couldn't speak a word of English—a regular Alphonse fellow—and the only thing we got out of him was a few salutes and his calling card!"

The colonel started down into his command post, dragging the staff officer by the arm. "I've got the whole headquarters as witnesses if anything comes of this," he continued. "Monsieur Dix was his name and I got his card to identify him with if they try to hang anything on me."

From among the litter of maps and papers on his nondescript field desk Colonel Blanck recovered the Frenchman's calling card with the high pointed letters and handed it to Lieutenant Colonel Smith.

"Those French are brief with their orders, aren't they?" the staff officer mused, studying the card with approving eyes. "It would take American headquarters about ten mimeographed pages to say the same thing. But I suppose brevity will come to us if the war lasts long enough."

"What are you talking about?" Colonel Blanck demanded.

"It's all here—all anybody would need," the lieutenant colonel continued, professional admiration in his voice. "You knew that you were to withdraw on orders of the French Division on your left and they get it all in just three words: 'H. Est Dix,' meaning 'Hour is ten.' Rather effective, isn't it, Colonel?"

The staff officer tossed the card back on the table and offered his hand to the regimental commander in congratulation. "Anyhow, you sly old fox," he exclaimed in high humor, "you needn't cover up. You took your chances and put it across. Anybody else but you with your luck would have drawn a general court, but I miss my guess if you don't draw stars. Big things have happened today with us everywhere and it's a lucky man who had a part in busting the boche war machine. The old first corps simply smashed them all along the line and right now the general has plans started for a counter smash with the whole outfit before the week's over. Our men held everywhere. We'll be on our way to the Vesle this time next week if my guess is worth a ——"

The jangling of the field telephone broke in. The operator summoned Colonel Blanck. The colonel recognized the tremulous voice at the other end with a start. "Ah, yes, Captain Ball," he said cautiously. "You're back at the reserve—yes. You been to Varennes with Monsieur D—." He bit the word off discreetly as it was escaping his mouth, then took the conversation firmly in hand.

"I understand everything," he said, his weary voice almost pleasant. "Yes—everything is fine. I'm very much pleased. Yes, this is Colonel Blanck in person. What's that—got a new French grammar today? I see. Well—if you don't treasure it too highly as a souvenir, it would please me if you'd just quietly drop it into the Marne. Yes, that's right. First time you're handy to the water, I mean. Yes. You must be tired—be sure to get some rest tonight if you can. Yes. Good night, Captain, see you soon. Yes—yes—everything's fine. Good night, Captain."

"One of your posts relaying a message in from the French, evidently," suggested the staff officer.

"Oh, no," replied Colonel Blanck quite casually, suppressing a yawn of crushing weariness. "I was just patting my supply officer on the back. He's been doing some wonderfully fine work today."

THE girl had come to Malaya to live with her brother. She told Gilbert so, soon after the launch started up-river. One doesn't stand on ceremony when the boat holds but one other white and three natives. Gilbert had moved a bag for her, she had thanked him, and so they had talked.

Hopkins, the brother, Gilbert knew slightly. He was a shoe-string rubber planter whose small place was a day's journey above Kuala Bharu where the launch was taking them.

Gilbert was conscious of a shock when she told him. He fumbled for something to say, and only succeeded in repeating:

"Your brother?"

She nodded, smiled, said: "Yes."

Gilbert knew by the soft light in her eyes that she was very fond of this brother of hers. That made him feel even worse—for John Hopkins had been dead four weeks. He sat silent under the knowledge that he possessed.

In a moment she said: "He is all I have now. I'll be glad to see him again."

The motor of the launch put-putted rhythmically. The prow met the slow current of the river and the water, heavily silted from the tin washings up country, divided with soft gurgles and slipped by steadily. From the dark, somber-green jungle on the right bank a hornbill flapped clumsily, saw them and wheeled back with harsh, discordant cries.

Gilbert studied her covertly. Rosy cheeks such as only the raw English climate could color; brown hair worn long, pleasing features, and a cool direct gaze. That gaze decided Gilbert. She would have sense and strength, and she would have to know soon, anyway.

Yet, though determined to break the cruel news to her, he still groped for a suitable way to bring it out.

"A harsh land, this, at times," he said after a moment.

She gazed across the reddish-brown water at the right bank, where the thick, tangled jungle came down to meet the water.

"It looks—well, mysterious," she said thoughtfully.

"You can never tell what it's going to do," Gilbert said desperately.

She looked at him.

"How do you mean?"

"It is hard on humans. They die easily."

# Tin in the Jungle

## *There's Love and Danger and Death in this Novelette of Malaya*

*By* T. T. FLYNN

Something in Gilbert's tone got across to her. She looked at him steadily, then spoke slowly, "There haven't been any deaths here, recently, have there?"

Gilbert could not meet her eyes.

"One," he answered wretchedly. "About four weeks ago."

Swift dread leaped into her face.

"What was—his name?"

Gilbert looked at her with compassion. "A rubber planter," he replied. "A chap by the name of—Hopkins."

Her right fist suddenly clenched until the nails bit into the palm and the knuckles showed white against the smooth skin. The color drained from her face and her eyelids closed. Her smooth throat fluttered as she swallowed the lump that Gilbert knew was pushing up and choking her.

In that long, silent moment when she fought with her emotions, admiration was born in Gilbert's breast. No weakling, this sister of the dead Hopkins, a girl that a man could take pride in. The two tears that finally forced their way between her closed lids made Gilbert think the more of her. She had loved her brother. He looked out over the river, that she might be alone with her grief.

PRESENTLY she wiped her eyes and spoke low. "Thank you for telling me. I know it must have been hard for you."

"I want you to know," Gilbert said earnestly, "that you can call on me for anything. The missionary's wife in Kuala Bharu will tell you that I can be trusted."

"Thank you."

After a moment she said, "How did John die?"

"Snake. A hamadryad, a king cobra, got into his room in the night. They are nasty beggars. Go after you without provocation. This one hid under his bed. When he stepped out in the morning it got him deep, on the bare ankle, twice."

"Did he suffer much?" she asked with an effort.

"No," Gilbert said kindly. "I heard all about it. He had a visitor at the time—a Portuguese named Vega. Vega heard him cry out and got to him in a few seconds. Hopkins had killed the cobra with a chair and was searching for a knife to slash the wound. It took a little time to find one—and cobra venom acts fast, you know. It was all over quickly."

She had tensed when Gilbert mentioned the Portuguese, Vega.

"What was that man doing there?" she asked abruptly.

"Stopped in for a visit I guess. He and his American partner, Jacobs, backed your brother with a good bit of money when rubber slumped. I guess your brother couldn't help putting him up when he came around. Vega seemed pretty upset by the affair."

"Why did you say John couldn't help putting him up when he came around?"

Gilbert shrugged. "I'll not be running men down behind their backs when I say that they don't stand very high with the white people in this part of the peninsula. Your brother went to him as a last hope, when he stood in danger of losing his land. They let him have the money he needed, and, I guess, took their pound of flesh, in writing, for it. They have that reputation, you know. For that reason Hopkins had to stand them around, I suppose. One doesn't snub men who might be able to ruin one some day."

She nodded. A silence fell between them.

Presently she asked: "Where is this man, Vega?"

"He and his partner have the place," Gilbert said unwillingly. "They produced a paper your brother had signed. One clause in it was to the effect that in the event of your brother's death, if Vega was not repaid, the land was to go to Vega at once, to safeguard the money he had loaned."

"His loan did not nearly cover the value of the land," she burst out. "I know that."

"One of the items in the 'pound of flesh,' I guess. Your brother probably thought little of that clause. I'm sure he didn't expect to die. We never do, until it is too late."

"These men were not paid?"

"No, there was no record of it. I'm afraid there is nothing you can do about the matter. The papers were quite regular and they followed the law."

There were no more questions. She stared up-river with a fixed gaze. Her face, drained of blood, had looked wan; now it seemed to Gilbert that her lips set and her features gradually took on a stony look. That was the word for it, stony. She had strength, and she had come to a decision and set her will inflexibly to it.

The sight of her sitting there, stony-faced, her trouble locked tight in her breast, touched Gilbert deeply. He wondered if she had come out on her last money, if she had enough to take her back, or keep her until she caught her bearings. His concern finally drove him to say, stumblingly,

"Miss Hopkins—I—are you—confound it, how does this leave you?"

"Alone," she said flatly.

"I mean—are you all right? Will you need any money to go back out? The missionary's wife will tell you that I am perfectly honorable. I'd like to help, if you need it, and will let me."

She smiled slightly at his confusion.

"That is nice of you. But, just at present, I am not going out."

"You will be welcome in Kuala Bharu, of course," Gilbert assured her hastily.

"I don't expect to stay there," she said calmly. "I am going on up-river to my brother's plantation."

Gilbert looked at her in amazement.

"I say," he protested. "You really can't, you know. Vega and Jacobs are there alone. They and a few of their native men. They're a cut-throat lot, taken all together. It's not really safe, even if we do have law at Singapore, and over most of the peninsula."

"I am sure I shall be all right."

IN HIS mind Gilbert had already assumed a protecting attitude toward her. It irritated him that she should disregard his warnings. That he was right only made it worse.

"You really mustn't think of it," he insisted. "The missionary's wife will tell you the same as I."

She replied in a voice as set as the stony look on her face: "Nevertheless, I am going. I have a reason. I shall remember your warning and watch the men closely."

Gilbert wanted to laugh angrily. A good girl fresh from the safety of England, trying to match wits with Jacobs and the fat, oily-skinned, gross, Vega—men old in the country, skilled in every form of trickery, with hearts as black as a moonless tropic night and brains filled with cunning. It was pitiful, if one hadn't begun to feel as Gilbert had. The very thought of her fresh youth coming close to the pig-eyed Portuguese and his evil little partner was revolting.

"You can't go there!" he burst out. "I tell you it's impossible!"

"Why is it?" she asked calmly.

"I've told you—neither man is fit to be met in Kuala Bharu—let alone a whole day's journey up-river. You don't know what that distance means."

"Just what does it mean?"

"It means you are ten hours away from any white person. Law has ceased to be for you. There is just you—and them. If you knew them as I do that would be enough. I tell you, it is impossible!" Gilbert had become so earnest that his voice had risen. The two Malay boys in the bow looked around at them.

Her face did not alter.

"I am sorry to worry you," she declared. "But—my mind is made up. Please forget about me."

"I cannot forbid you—if you insist," Gilbert said stiffly.

She caught the coolness in his voice, leaned forward quickly, and said: "Perhaps you are right—but I am going. Can't we remain friends in spite of that?"

Gilbert couldn't hold his irritation. "Of course, I shall feel honored if you will permit it," he said earnestly.

The faintest trace of color returned to her cheeks. She smiled wanly and, on that basis, they covered the rest of the day's journey to Kuala Bharu.

It was not much of a place. There two rivers came together and made one larger stream. On the right bank stood the missionary's neat compound, shaded by great cassias. A little farther along was the native kampong with its clustered huts thatched with leaves of the nipa-palm, and the more substantial buildings of the two Chinese traders.

Mary Hopkins was welcomed heartily by the missionary and his wife. Strangers were infrequent. Those just out with all the latest news and gossip were treasured.

It was pathetic, the questions they asked about home, the way they hung on her words. They got the Singapore papers of course, and even London papers and magazines, but somehow it was not like direct living news.

They talked all evening, the missionary, his wife, faded by years in the tropics, Mary Hopkins, and Gilbert, who was a district engineer. When the news from home ran low and conversation shifted to Malayan affairs, Gilbert told of Mary Hopkins' determination to go up-river to her brother's plantation.

In the moment's silence that fell, the chickchack on the ceiling gave its strangely human cry. The missionary and his wife looked at her with concern.

"I—ah, I really wouldn't do it," the missionary said after a moment.

"But my mind is made up," Mary Hopkins replied, and her features, which had relaxed somewhat, shifted back into the stony look.

A glance passed between the good missionary and his wife. That lady nodded slightly when Mary looked the other way, and by that nod promised to do her best when she had the girl alone.

Later, before they retired, she did. But, when she had said her say, Mary Hopkins only reiterated her intention. And when the missionary lady offered to make the trip also, Mary thanked her and stated that she wished to go alone.

There was nothing to do but let her have her own way.

Gilbert admitted it moodily the next morning, when the missionary's wife told him of her failure.

"I'd go with her, wanted or not, if I didn't have to dash back to the coast and meet two men who are stopping in from Singapore to see me!" he burst out. "Why—why does she have to do this foolish thing?"

Years had given the little faded missionary lady wisdom. She read in Gilbert, who was only thirty-two, what he himself did not know. And sighed inwardly for this problem that was enveloping the two young people.

"There is great sorrow in her heart," she told him. "And more. I do not pretend to know what it is, but it shows in her face and every tone of her voice when she speaks of going up-river. She will go and I am sure the good God will guide her steps safely. He does, you know, when one is good and innocent, as she is."

"The devil walks with Vega and Jacobs," Gilbert declared heatedly. "Even the Bible admits that he sometimes wins!"

"It is in God's hands."

Gilbert was not comforted or reassured. A sudden thought sent him in search of Mary Hopkins. He found her on the river bank, looking at the missionary's launch, in

which it had been decided she would make the trip next day.

"Look here," Gilbert said directly. "You know how I feel about all this. I am forced to go down-river again tomorrow. Will you take my personal boy, Ali? He's been with me for three years, and I trust him implicitly."

"The one who steered your launch yesterday?"

"Yes."

"I don't like to take your man away from you."

"I insist," Gilbert said firmly.

She yielded with a slight smile.

"Very well—if you insist."

Gilbert stood on the rickety landing next morning with the missionary and his wife and watched the missionary's launch swerve out into the river, plow across the muddy waters brought down from the tin mines by the right fork, and enter the clearer waters of the smaller left fork. And not even the fact that the trusted Ali was with Mary Hopkins, and the launch was manned by three Christian mission boys, lightened the heaviness of his spirit.

DURING the long hours of that day Mary Hopkins realized more fully what ten hours up-river meant. Mile after solitary mile of somber, brooding jungle-clad banks slipped slowly astern. The river twisted in and out until all sense of direction was lost. There were bars, shallows, and swift places. And always the walls of green on each side. They saw snakes swimming in the water, monster crocodiles sunning themselves on the banks, birds flapping overhead, and once in a while, when the channel cut close to the bank, they would catch sight of some animal fading back to safety. But in all the day they saw no sign of a white man and very few of natives. The growing thought that, if she should need help, the long deserted miles would bar it away, was disquieting. But she put that behind her and resolutely set her mind on what lay ahead.

They came to the plantation in the late afternoon. On the left bank of the river the tangled jungle growth gave way to even rows of young rubber trees that stretched back out of sight. Farther on there was a small landing. Back of it a clearing had been left among the rows of rubber trees. In it was a small wooden bungalow thatched with nipa-palm leaves. Back of that the smoke-house, store-house, the long thatched coolie-line, where the contract Tamil labor lived, and several other small buildings.

It brought a lump into Mary Hopkins's throat, this work that her brother had accomplished at a cost which she alone knew. But she had little time for such thoughts. From the spacious veranda in front of the bungalow a figure issued, and came heavily down to the landing to meet the launch.

Even before she saw the features, the full-fleshed form filled her with dislike. And when the launch slid in closer and the pulpy, oily-skinned features became visible, the feeling heightened. The Portuguese stared at the launch with little beady eyes. And when he saw that it held but one pretty white girl besides the native crew, they glittered with awakened interest.

He was on the landing, his sun hat of grey felt in his hand, his oily features creased in a smile of welcome, when the launch floated near enough for one of the mission boys to leap ashore with a painter and bring it alongside.

Mary Hopkins stepped out on the landing.

Vega bowed low.

"I do not know what brings this good fortune to our door," he said in accented English. "But I am content. Senhora, I, Manuel Vega, am at your service."

Mary Hopkins gazed into his face.

"I am the sister of John Hopkins," she said calmly.

For a fleeting brace of seconds the smile on the pulpy features set; the flesh about beady eyes crinkled in astonishment. Then Vega, master of himself once more, bowed low again.

"So happy to know you," he exclaimed. And straightening up and shooting a sharp look at her! "I did not know that John Hopkins had a sister."

"Doubtless there are many things you are not aware of," Mary Hopkins replied coolly.

Vega digested that for a moment, his little eyes boring into her. Then he shrugged and spread his hands out, palms upward, and showed none-too-clean teeth in a smile.

"Doubtless," he agreed suavely. "You have, perhaps, come to tell me some of them?"

"Perhaps," she agreed pleasantly, and

turned to the launch and ordered—"Ali, put my bags out."

Vega's eyes widened, and then as they took in the girl's trim figure they narrowed and flamed. He swallowed and passed his tongue over his thick lips. When she turned he was leering.

"You have come to stay with my partner and me?"

"I have come to pay my brother's plantation a visit," she said coldly. "Have you any objections?"

"I? Ah, senhorita, a thousand times no! To have you here is, is a pleasure what I have not had for long time. My partner feels same way I am sure. Welcome, many times welcome." Vega made his exaggerated bow once again.

Ali, lithe, muscular, clad in an old pair of Gilbert's whites, cut off to make shorts, and a short-sleeved white shirt, with a keen wavy-bladed Malay kris thrust through his front belt, stood at her elbow with the two bags at his feet. The mission boys lounged behind him.

Vega stared at Ali.

"That is Senhor Gilbert's boy, not?" he asked.

"Yes," Mary Hopkins agreed. "Mr. Gilbert lent him to me."

Vega leered.

"Senhor Gilbert is always so, so thoughtful," he purred.

Mary flushed.

"If you will tell Ali where to take my bags, and the other boys where they can stay for the night, I shall be grateful."

"Of course! Ten thousand pardons! If you will have seat on the veranda I will attend to everything."

She walked up the path which led to the thatched bungalow. Vega gave Ali and the mission boys orders and then hastened heavily after her.

"My partner, Jacobs, is out shooting pigeons," he said expansively, stopping before her. "Unfortunate, not? While he is gone a paradise bird visits his home, if you will permit me poetry." He smiled widely.

"Indulge freely—if you have a poet's soul," Mary Hopkins retorted dryly, and transferred her gaze to the scene about the bungalow.

Vega caught her indifference, stopped smiling, stared at the side of her face for a moment and then shrugged slightly.

"Yes, not," he said. "I will now go and order tiffin prepared and see that your quarters are placed in order. Excuse, please."

She nodded, and did not even bother to follow his progress through the wide front door with her eyes.

VEGA and Jacobs were living in the bungalow. Vega had the Chinese houseboy carry most of their effects to one of the smaller buildings off to the side and turned the bungalow over to her. There, after she had had a chance to freshen up, a late tiffin of rice and curry, with sambals of chopped wild pineapple, grated cocoanut and mango chutney was served by a wizened Chinese cook who came and went like a shadow.

Vega had already eaten, but he sat across from her and sipped a glass of wine and talked blandly. Not many minutes passed before Mary Hopkins saw that the Portuguese was skillfully trying to draw out the reason for her visit. Over the dessert she told him, artlessly, as much of the truth as was necessary.

"I came out from England to live with John. His last letter said that he was in good health. He wanted me here with him. And then, on the way up to Kuala Bharu, Mr. Gilbert told me that John had died. It was a great shock. I decided to come the rest of the way and look at his plantation."

Vega had eyed her searchingly as she told it and a look of relief flitted across his face as he agreed: 'Yes, yes, you did quite right. It will be nice to take back memories of the place your brother once owned. Senhor Gilbert doubtless told you that title to the holdings had passed into new hands, not?"

"He did."

Vega drained his glass, set it down, and shook his head.

"Very sad; very unfortunate, everything," he stated. "My partner and I were desolated—but business is business, and we had to take over the management of the place and try to get our money out of it. Doubtless we shall lose as it is."

"Then you loaned John a great deal of money?"

"Large sums," Vega declared. "Rubber was down below the cost of production. Planters were going bankrupt everywhere—and Senhor Hopkins, your brother, was

desperate. He came to us, my partner Jacobs and I, and pleaded with tears in his eyes for a loan. We had little, but we shared with him, only asking that he sign papers to protect us against what the future brought. We were glad to help him. Friendship is a beautiful thing, Miss Hopkins, not?"

She put down the spoonful of gula malacca that was near her lips, as though it had suddenly lost its appeal for her.

"You were such good friends?" she asked.

Vega poured another glass of wine from the bottle that stood by his right elbow. He drained it and then said heavily: "It was a beautiful friendship, Miss Hopkins. My partner and I thought much of your brother—and he returned it."

She glanced at the gross face, marked with dissipation, and then looked away.

"The loan was not repaid?" she asked after a moment.

Vega shot her a look, shook his head, said quickly: "No—it fell due just after he, ah, passed away. He had asked us to extend it. We agreed to do so and I was here to see him about it. Before anything more could be done he, ah, was called to his Fathers. I felt it deeply."

"You still have his note then?"

"There was no note," Vega said smoothly. "He signed an agreement acknowledging receipt of the money and agreeing to certain conditions. The money was not repaid, the conditions had to be fulfilled. A matter of simple justice, not?"

"It would seem that way." Mary Hopkins pushed back her chair and stood up. Vega hastily followed. "You will sit on the veranda and take the air?" he asked. "My partner should come soon. Darkness will be on us quickly."

They went out on the veranda and took seats. Ali, Gilbert's trusted Malay, was squatting in front of the house in the shade of a large forest tree, which had been left standing when the jungle was cleared. He was gazing in their direction and Mary Hopkins realized that he had been looking through the front screening all the time she was inside with Vega. The thought somehow made her feel better.

They had been there but a few minutes when Jacobs came around the corner of the house. He was a small, dried-up little man with a sharp face, thin cruel lips, and high cheek bones across which the skin stretched tautly. He wore an old sun helmet, and was dressed in khaki shorts and shirt which were dark with sweat. At sight of Mary Hopkins, sitting by Vega, he scowled slightly, and came to the top of the steps staring at her.

Vega arose.

"Senhorita Hopkins, I have pleasure to present my partner, Sehnor Jacobs," he said grandly. "This, Jacobs, is sister of our good friend, John Hopkins."

For an instant Jacobs looked startled.

"Pleased to meet you," he said, and looked at Vega.

"Senhorita Hopkins came out to live with her brother," Vega explained. "She did not know all until she got to Kuala Bharu. She has come up to pay her brother's plantation short visit."

"Does she know it ain't her brother's any more?" Jacobs asked shortly.

Vega shrugged the crudeness away.

"Yes—it has all been explained."

Jacobs nodded, sat down on the top step, and lit a cigaret.

MARY HOPKINS had been studying him. At that point she questioned with interest—"Did you kill many pigeons, Mr. Jacobs?"

"Pigeons? What pigeons?" Jacobs raised his eyebrows and stared at her.

Vega said hastily: "I explained to Senhorita Hopkins that you were out shooting pigeons. Doubtless you left them with the cook, not?"

"Oh, sure, I left 'em with the Chink back in the kitchen. Got quite a mess."

"How nice. I am fond of birds. Will you have them for dinner?"

Vega glanced at her uncomfortably and Jacobs scowled again.

"We feed them to the coolies," he said bruskly. "They are probably in the coolie pot by now. These Chink cooks work fast."

"Oh. Well, perhaps you will shoot some for me another day."

Jacobs stood up abruptly.

"I'm a busy man," he replied shortly. "I won't have a chance to shoot again for some time. If you are fond of birds I'll see that the cook serves you plenty of chicken." He started for the front door.

"We have moved to the little house," Vega told him quickly. "All your things are there. Senhorita Hopkins shall have the best we can give her, not?"

Jacobs was obviously short tempered. He halted and his thin lips tightened.

"Certainly!" he spat out. "Anything! I'll trust you to see to that, Vega." He went back down the steps and disappeared around the side of the house.

"I don't believe Mr. Jacobs likes to have me here," Mary Hopkins said thoughtfully.

"But surely, yes," Vega declared heartily, and leaned closer to her. "You must not mind Jacobs. He was surprised to see you. He has his little ways—but underneath he is, is tender as maiden's heart—just like Manuel Vega. I am so, what you call it—soft, that I am foolish when beautiful young lady like you is around." He hitched his chair an inch or so closer.

Ali's sharp eyes took in the move. His right arm dropped carelessly on the handle of his keen kris, which projected across his stomach. But no move of his was needed. Mary Hopkins stood up.

"I am tired," she said. "I think I will go to my room and try to get some sleep."

Vega was disappointed.

"You will not stay and watch darkness fall?" he asked.

"No."

"Then you will have dinner with us, not?"

"I am sorry—but I think if I once get to sleep I shall stay that way until morning."

"Ah, I shall be desolated."

She asked: "I suppose my brother's trunk is still here, and his personal things?"

"Yes—they are in the storehouse."

"I would like to have them brought to my room."

"Anything what you desire I shall see is done," Vega said eagerly. He stood up. "I shall attend to it right away, Senhorita Hopkins. Vega, he is soft, I tell you."

"Thank you." She entered the house.

Vega stared at the door a minute, rolled his little piggish eyes, and then went heavily down the front steps and around the house.

Ali, still squatting under the tree, watched him go impassively. Then he stood up and moved to the foot of the front steps and squatted again, silent, watchful.

NIGHT fell soon after that. One moment the sun hovered over the line of jungle across the river. The next it dropped swiftly out of sight and quick darkness closed in. Frogs broke into voice up and down the river, insects began to drone through the air, fireflys winked out.

Two half-naked Tamils brought an air-tight tin trunk and a dispatch case to the bungalow. When they were in her room Mary Hopkins drew the curtain across the screened window, and brought the lamp close.

There was a key tied to a handle of each. She opened the trunk first. The contents were in disorder as though they had been hauled out hastily and searched. The few papers in the dispatch case were the same way. Someone had gone through the belongings of the dead man thoroughly, taken what was desired, and dumped the remainder back carelessly.

Her lips pressed tight together, Mary Hopkins looked at the open trunk. She had to bite them finally, even then could not keep the tears from squeezing through her tight-shut lids. But her weakness did not last long. She dried her eyes and her face set in the stony look that Gilbert had noticed. She tenderly folded the dead man's clothes back in the trunk and closed the lid. For a long time she sat and gazed thoughtfully into space.

Before retiring she went out on the veranda to look at the night. A white form rose up from the bottom of the steps and startled her. She recognized Ali.

"What are you doing there, Ali?" she asked. "Didn't Mr. Vega show you where to sleep for the night?"

"Tuan told me where to sleep," Ali replied softly.

"Where?"

"Before your door."

"Mr. Vega told you that?" she asked, surprised.

"No. Tuan Besar, the big master, Gilbert."

In the darkness Mary Hopkins flushed.

"I shall be all right, Ali," she said hurriedly. "Go with the other boys and spend the night."

"Tuan has ordered," Ali said firmly.

That was the last thing she thought of that night—the silent, white-clad watcher with his terrible kris—and the man who had ordered him to guard her door night and day. She slept soundly and without fear.

The next morning the launch went down-river, for the missionary needed it in his daily work. Mary Hopkins stood on the small landing, Ali behind her, and watched it dwindle and pass from sight around the

next bend. Vega had come down to see it off also. He turned to her and smiled broadly.

"Now we are alone," he said with heavy humor. "We will enjoy ourselves, not? You will come to like Manuel Vega, senhorita."

She took no notice, remarked absently: "I think I will walk around the plantation."

"Yes. I will show you everything," Vega said eagerly.

"Please don't bother. I want to be alone and try to get my mind settled."

"As you wish."

The unhealthy face of the Portuguese wore a disappointed scowl as she walked up the bank. And when his eyes rested on Ali's back the scowl grew blacker.

Dark-skinned, lean, Tamil coolies, wearing dirty-white loin clothes, were taking the little porcelain sap cups from the small spigots at the bottom angle of the lozenge-shaped scars which had been cut in the bearing trees early that morning. They emptied the sap in buckets, and the buckets when full into a clumsy big-wheeled tank cart drawn by a hump-backed bullock.

Ali explained that the cuts were made early and the sap ran until about ten o'clock, when the hot sun healed the wound. The liquid latex was hauled to the chemical house and certain chemicals added. Then it was taken to the smoke house and coagulated into rubber sheets, which were sent to Singapore and sold by the pound.

It was interesting, but presently Mary Hopkins walked on farther, to where the latest clearing had been done and the trees were too young to tap. Still farther the cleared part of the plantation ended and the virgin jungle rose in a living wall.

She looked at it with interest.

"Do you suppose we could walk in there, Ali?" she asked.

"There should be a path."

They walked along the edge of the jungle and presently did come to a path leading in. It was narrow, not too well worn, but Ali turned into it without hesitation.

The narrow path ran through a wall of shrubs, bushes, and underwood from which huge trees shot high up and spread out at the top. There were ferns, mosses, orchids on every side, and huge lianas, immense rope-like vines, ran from tree to tree, up and down and looped and bound the jungle into one vast tangle.

It was hot. Insects buzzed and bit. Mary Hopkins was quickly uncomfortable, but she followed on after Ali. Presently he stopped.

"You want go back?" he asked, showing white teeth in a smile.

"Do you suppose there is a creek ahead anywhere?"

"Allah knows. Perhaps."

"If there is I would like to see it."

Ali turned obediently and went on. But shortly he stopped again, and laid his hand on his kris hilt.

JACOBS was striding toward them.

The man had seen them first. His thin lips were tight and there was a frank scowl on his face.

"What are you doing back here?" he rasped when he came up.

Ali shrugged.

Mary Hopkins answered easily: "Just taking a walk. I have heard so much about the jungle that I determined to see it before I went back home."

Jacobs stared at her as though to see whether she was speaking the truth. The scowl gradually left his face.

"Well, don't go any farther back," he said surlily. "Something might happen to you."

"Ali can take care of me."

The scowl returned.

"Ali be damned! He won't help you if a tiger gets after you. A report came this morning that tiger tracks were seen a couple of miles away. The beast might be around here now. Go back to the bungalow. That's the safest place."

At the mention of tiger Ali's eyes rolled.

"Tiger has much evil spirits," he declared.

Jacobs was blocking their way, showing no evidence of allowing them to pass. She gave in. "I'll go back," she said. "But your tiger doesn't worry me a bit."

"You'd better let him worry you," Jacobs retorted. Fancy, perhaps, but there seemed to be something more than warning in his voice, something kin to a threat.

He followed them into the open rows of young rubber trees, and on into the bearing groves. "Let's go and see what is down this way, Ali," Mary Hopkins finally said, and pointed to the upper end of the place.

Ali nodded, swung off in that direction obediently. She followed.

Jacobs watched them go, frowning. Then

shrugged and went on toward the bungalow.

Carelessly, almost indifferently, Mary Hopkins kept on, until she was sure they were out of sight of Jacobs and anyone in the vicinity of the bungalow. Then she said suddenly: "I would like to go back up the jungle path, Ali."

The lithe Malay looked uncomfortable.

"If there is tiger, it would be not wise," he ventured.

Mary smiled.

"There isn't any tiger, I am sure," she said.

"But Tuan said so. Perhaps. Very great evil if so. Tuan Besar would not like it."

She didn't know whether to be irritated or amused.

"Bother Mr. Gilbert," she said, half-smiling. "He hasn't anything to do with what I desire. I shall go alone."

"But the tiger!"

"Mr. Jacobs didn't have a gun. Would he be walking unarmed in the jungle if he thought there was a tiger near?"

Ali nodded thoughtfully.

"Of course if you are afraid—"

Ali drew himself up proudly and touched the hilt of his kris.

"I will lead the way," he said gravely.

So they went once more into the heavy jungle. Kept on this time beyond the point where Jacobs had met them. Shortly they came to the banks of a small stream flowing easily toward the river. It was bridged by a log.

Ali stopped and looked around.

"You want cross?" he questioned uneasily.

Silence had closed in about them. There was no breeze. Each leaf, frond, and branch hung motionless, and the heat pressed moistly about. Mary took a small handkerchief from the pocket of her skirt, dried the perspiration from her forehead, thrust the handkerchief back carelessly and looked about with indecision.

"There ought to be a path," she said, half to herself.

"Not so good patch across water," Ali said hopefully.

"On this side, I mean. A path going along the stream?"

Ali looked down at the ground. Walked back and forth scanning the vegetation at each side. Suddenly he grunted and pushed aside part of a thick bush. Back of the screening branches a small path started and led upstream.

"I want to see where it leads."

The ways and whims of white people were too much at times for Ali. He pushed through the branches, held them for her, and, when she was in, led the way along the path.

It was even narrower than the one they had just quitted, but had been kept well opened up. Some of the cutting looked very recent.

For less than a quarter of a mile it followed the general course of the stream, and at last turned into the bank again. At that point there was a small bar in the stream bed, laid bare by low water. The sand of the bar was marked with shoe prints and had been dug over, with a shovel. The earth at the sides of the banks had been dug away also, and there were marks of a shovel up and down the stream.

Ali eyed the scene. His eyes suddenly lighted with interest. He leaped lightly from the bank to the sand bar, stooped, scooped up a handful of sand, and examined it closely.

Then he turned to her and exclaimed excitedly, "timor—tin!"

Mary Hopkins was not startled. Indeed she took the matter quite calmly, only asking: "Are you sure there is tin present?"

Ali nodded violently, dropped the handful of sand, picked up another and thrust it out at her.

"Plenty tin!" he exclaimed. "Ali know! Tin here, then tin all around, everywhere!" He took in the surrounding jungle with a wide sweep of his bare right arm.

She looked at the small stream, the rank vegetation crushing everything in, and the tell-tale signs of discovery on the sand bar and stream banks. "Ali," she questioned, "is it worth much money?"

There was vast respect in Ali's voice as he waded over to the bank.

"The wealth of a sultan, nay two sultans," he stated. "Tin does not grow alone."

"Jacobs knows of this?"

Ali nodded.

"The tiger guards his kill," he declared. "Perhaps it is best we go from this place. Kuala Bharu is far from here—and these men are vastly evil."

Her face set hard and sad.

"Yes, Ali," she agreed, "they are evil.

Let us go back. Say no word of what we have seen."

Ali scrambled up the bank and started back along the narrow path. Mary Hopkins turned to follow him, and as she did so a scraping branch caught the handkerchief which protruded from the pocket of her sport skirt and dragged it forth. When the last sign of their presence had vanished the bit of cloth still hung there, mute evidence of their visit.

THEY got out of the jungle without meeting anyone. Ali suggested that it would be better to circle around and come in from the direction they had been heading for when they left Jacobs. They did so—and met Jacobs near the bungalow.

"You've been out a long time," he said abruptly.

She was cool.

"Is that so? Everything is so interesting that I've just been wandering around without thought of the time."

"I didn't see you," Jacobs declared bluntly. "I was walking down that way myself."

"The place is so big that it isn't hard to miss one."

Jacobs grunted.

"Tiffin will be ready shortly," he said. "You'd better come in and get ready. And this afternoon take a siesta. Stop walking around. It isn't good for you."

Once again there was the hint of threat in his tone. Mary Hopkins did not show by any sign that she noticed it.

They ate tiffin together, Jacobs, Vega and she. Vega talked expansively and said nothing of importance. She listened politely, tried to answer lightly, act as though there was nothing on her mind. Jacobs applied himself to the food, paid little or no attention to the talk, and when he was through excused himself and went off for his siesta.

Over a tall glass of ginger beer Vega tried to linger and bring the talk to a personal basis. She pleaded fatigue and he took his departure, visibly disappointed.

Mary Hopkins did not sleep that siesta hour. She lay on the cot which had been her brother's bed, and thought and thought. When the mid-day heat had cooled a trifle she bathed, changed into clean white clothes and went outside again, still thoughtful.

There was no sign of Jacobs or Vega. With Ali close behind her she walked down by the coolie line, and slowly back around to the chemical shack. She looked inside there for a moment and then went on aimlessly to the storehouse. It was built native style, bamboo side walls and thatched roof. As she neared the windowless back a voice came through the porous bamboo walls.

It was Jacobs', talking heatedly. She could not help but hear his words. "I tell you it don't pay to fool with the damn rubber! It's chicken feed alongside of what we've got in our hands. Let the coolies go."

Vega answered, his oily voice persuasive. "But the looks. It is better that we seem to raise rubber for a while. It will look better."

"Hell with looks!" Jacobs exclaimed impatiently. "You fixed everything legal, didn't you?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"But what?"

"One never knows. The sister has appeared. Better we wait until she is back in England, and has forgotten about her brother's place."

"Send her away!" snapped Jacobs. "Why didn't you tell her there was no place to stay here? I caught her prowling back along the path today. Said she was looking about."

"Yes, perfectly natural, not? She comes to see and she does so. Forget her, my friend. Her face is pretty, but her head is empty inside. They are all so. Leave her to Manuel."

"Don't start your tricks again," said Jacobs impatiently. "There's too much on hand to run any risks."

Her cheeks flaming, Mary Hopkins moved away, and Vega's answer blended into a jumble of meaningless words.

DINNER that evening was uneventful. Jacobs said little, applied himself to his food in sour silence. Mary Hopkins only spoke when she was spoken to. Vega alone talked, expansively. But when his remarks fell flat for the greater part of the meal he finally slowed up.

Jacobs left as soon as the meal was over. Vega lingered on in his chair. His beady eyes rested on her calculatingly.

"You are so, so beautiful," he said suddenly, showing his teeth in what was meant to be a gallant smile.

It made no impression. Mary told him coolly: "So I've been told."

Vega drained his wine glass.

"I tell you, I think you are sweet girl. Las' night I have dream about you."

"I had a dream about you, also," Mary Hopkins told him on sudden impulse.

"Ah, you have dream about Manuel? You think about him, not? Explain to him what was in the dream." Vega hitched his chair nearer the corner of the table and leaned over toward her with eager anticipation.

She looked at him steadily and said slowly: "I dreamt that I saw you have a snake, a king cobra. You were carrying it."

Her words had a most unusual effect. Vega's pulpy features suddenly paled. He grasped the edge of the table with his fleshy hands, stared at her with widened eyes, and said with an effort: "A snake? A hamadryad?"

"Yes. You were carrying it."

Fear etched itself on the gross features of the Portuguese. He swallowed. A sudden tense silence fell between them. At last, with an effort he asked: "What did I do with this snake, senhorita?"

Satisfied, Mary lowered her eyes, smiled, and shook her head.

"I don't know. Dreams fade off that way, you know. At times it seems that I am going to remember what you did next, and I try, but it always slips away from me. Perhaps if I keep on trying it will come back."

Vega sat back up, poured a glassful of wine and gulped it.

"No," he said, shaking his head with determination. "Do not bother your pretty head about it, senhorita. That is meant for thoughts much nicer than the so, so slimy snake, not? I, Manuel, will give you fine thoughts to dream over. We will sit out on the veranda, not? There we watch the moon and I tell you so, so softly."

"Thank you. I don't care to sit out on the veranda."

"You do not like me, senhorita?"

She said nothing.

The man's little eyes flamed as they rested on her. He stood up and said a trifle thickly: "I am very good fellow, senhorita. You not know Manuel, that is all. Come, give me one kiss an' you will change those feeling." He stepped around the corner of the table.

Mary Hopkins sprang to her feet and slipped around the table away from him.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Vega," she declared coldly.

Vega laughed.

"No. I think of myself now," he said, and made a sudden move toward her, swift for all his apparent bulk.

She barely eluded the clutch of his extended fingers.

Without warning the front screen door burst open and Ali leaped into the room. His terrible, wavy-bladed kris was swinging in his right hand and his face was set. Two swift strides brought him across the room. The keen blade flickered through the air at Vega's head.

Mary cried out chokingly.

Vega dropped.

The blade swept harmlessly over his head. Before Ali could strike again Vega had scrambled under the table. The Malay drew his kris back to stab.

Mary Hopkins cried: "Ali! Stop! Let him alone!"

Ali hesitated.

"Stop!" she repeated, and ran around the edge of the table and caught at his arm. "You mustn't!" she gasped. "Don't k-kill him!"

"Better he is dead," Ali argued. "He is snake. I saw. Next time perhaps I not see. Snake strike deep then—and I cannot face Tuan Besar."

The strain she had been under, the sudden shock of events, the abrupt let down, had been too much for her nerves. She could not keep her voice steady.

"Th-there will be no next time, Ali. I am g-going back down the river in the morning. There is a boat here. They will have to send me."

Ali dropped his blade.

AT THAT moment the screen door again opened and Jacobs entered. He looked at Ali, the drawn kris, the shaken girl, and snapped:

"What's going on here? I heard a scream. What's the idea? Where's Vega?"

From under the table shaken tones issued.

"Take him outside!"

"Who?"

"The Malay!"

"Get out!" Jacobs ordered Ali.

Ali looked at Mary Hopkins inquiringly.

She nodded. "Wait outside the door," she requested.

Ali went silently, the kris still in his hand. When the door had closed behind him there was a scuffling under the table and the fat form of Vega crawled out and stood up, white-faced.

Jacobs glared at him.

"What's the idea of crawling under the table like a dog?" he demanded.

Vega began to curse wildly in Portuguese. Finally he broke into English to explain—"The —— tried to cut my head off! My pistol is not with me. I dropped under the table to live! I will shoot him like a dog!" And he resorted to Portuguese again to express his feelings.

Mary Hopkins had recovered some of her poise. She exclaimed determinedly: "You will not do a thing to Ali. You brought it on yourself by trying to seize me."

"Up to your old tricks again!" Jacobs snarled at Vega. "You fool! You brainless fool!"

"It was just a so, so little kiss I wanted," Vega retorted sulkily.

"Just a little kiss! And for that you'd risk—" Jacobs suddenly broke off his flow of furious speech and ended up explosively: "You fool!"

"I've had enough. I am going down river tomorrow morning," Mary Hopkins declared. "I shall have to ask for your motor boat."

"A good idea," Jacobs growled. "This isn't any place for a woman. You made a mistake to come up in the first place. I'll see that the boat is ready all right." To Vega he said shortly, "Come on out of here. You've done enough for one evening."

Vega, though much larger than his cruel-lipped partner, evidently respected him. He muttered under his breath, scowled at Mary Hopkins, and followed. Ali was standing outside the door with his drawn blade. Vega stepped hastily past him and hurried down the front steps. The night swallowed the two men.

MARY HOPKINS slept little that night. Fear of Vega was not at the bottom of it. The silent figure of Ali, dozing in front of her door was reassurance against that. But her thoughts were racing, weaving, seeking to piece a definite plan out of the information she had collected. She had come to the plantation, driven by knowledge that she possessed, and intuition. The intuition was now certainty. But the incident with Vega the night before had driven home the fact that after all she was but a woman, ten hours from all law.

She finally decided to take everything to Ali's Tuan Besar, his big master, Mr. Gilbert. With that she slept.

The first thing in the morning she got Ali to take her brother's trunk and dispatch case to the rear of the clearing, where there was a trash pile. There she burned everything, remaining until the last shred of cloth and bit of paper was consumed and the wooden sides and bottom of the air-tight trunk were burned out. Just before leaving she noticed Jacobs walking in the direction of the jungle. She paid him no attention, went to her room, locked her bags, and ate.

Ali reported that the boat was ready. He took the bags. She followed him. The launch, a little smaller than the missionary's, was waiting by the small landing. Vega was standing there, a rifle resting butt-down before him. He kept a sharp watch on Ali.

Jacobs had not returned from the jungle. Evidently he did not wish to see her off. She took her seat in the launch.

A thin Chinaman and a Malay made up the crew of the boat. Ali sat behind her, under the awning which covered most of the middle part of the boat, and gave no heed to the crew.

Vega spoke to the Chinaman curtly. The man nodded, stepped ashore, untied the painter which held their stern to the dock against the push of the current, and then stepped back in the boat and kept it from drifting away by reaching out and holding on to the edge of the landing.

Vega gave him more directions.

Their last minute of contact with the plantation arrived, and at that moment the hurrying form of Jacobs appeared at the top of the bank.

"Hold that boat!" he shouted.

Vega snapped an order. The Chinaman held the straining boat closer to the landing.

Jacobs had been running, and was panting when he stopped on the landing. He pushed his sun helmet to the back of his head, glared down in the boat at Mary Hopkins and demanded: "Why did you slip back in the jungle yesterday, after I warned you not to?"

She answered: "You told me there was a

tiger around—but I also told you that I didn't care about that. I wanted to go—and I did."

"Yes," Jacobs grated. "Spying behind my back!"

"What?"

"Spying! I found your handkerchief on the stream bank where I've been working."

"Yes. I found a path and followed it."

"You couldn't find that path! You searched! You came here to spy!"

"What for?"

"To—to trick us!"

Mary flushed angrily. Then, because she was almost away from them, she spoke her mind recklessly and bluffed.

"I did come here to watch you. Why shouldn't I—you murdered my brother? I wanted evidence, and I have it."

Vega paled and his ungainly figure seemed to shrink. Jacobs tensed. Then reason returned to him and he snapped: "Prove it! We'll go down-river with you and face your evidence in court. John Hopkins was bitten by a cobra."

"It was put into his room to bite him."

"Prove it!" Vega blustered.

"In good time. Meanwhile I'm going to take the plantation away from you."

Vega laughed. But Jacobs became icy cool.

"How?" he demanded.

Without thinking, she carried her bluff on through.

"My brother paid what he owed. I knew that all along—for I sent him the money from England to do it."

"Your proof!" Jacobs rasped.

"There was a receipt. You couldn't find it when you went through his things. But there was a false bottom in his trunk—and there he had a memorandum telling where the receipt and his other valuables were hidden. He always told me that when he died I was to look in the bottom of his trunk. I did—and now I can take the plantation back. I promise you his murderer will be punished."

Jacobs stared at her for a long moment. Then he suddenly wheeled on Vega and raged:

"I knew you would mess things up someway! You fool! You blundered! You swore there was no way to lose. Why didn't you burn the damn trunk?"

"How could I know about the bottom? It was not even known he had a sister! I like not the way you talk!"

"Like, hell! What do I care what you like! First you let the trap exist—then you act like a fool and let the sister come here and spring the trap. Pretty face—empty head! Leave her to Manuel! You—whose name is known everywhere for trickery. You—you soft-headed fool! You've been tricked yourself this time and you may hang for it!"

MARY HOPKINS had been listening eagerly to their words. Caution came to her with a rush. She turned and spoke a few low words to Ali. He hissed an order to the Chinaman, drew his kris and thrust the point against the man's side.

Obediently the Chinaman let go of the landing. Ali reached out and pushed. The launch moved slightly, the current caught it, and a gap quickly grew between the side and the landing.

Jacobs' back was to them. His tirade had diverted Vega's attention. But when there was fully six feet of water between the landing and the departing boat Vega noticed it. He pointed.

Jacobs wheeled, saw and shouted: "Bring that boat back here!"

Mary Hopkins spoke to Ali again. He ordered the Chinaman to start the motor. The man hesitated. Ali dug the sharp point of the kris in his side. He bent over the motor.

"Come back!" Jacobs ordered again.

They were a score of feet away and drifting faster every second. Under Ali's prodding kris the Chinaman worked feverishly at the motor.

Jacobs suddenly snatched the rifle from Vega's hands, brought it to aim and shouted: "Bring that boat back or I'll shoot!"

The Chinaman caught sight of the rifle and ducked. Ali gouged him with the kris. The Celestial squealed and bent to his task again.

Jacobs fired.

Ali staggered. Caught his balance with an effort. Clenched his lips tightly. A dark circle appeared on the right side of his shirt. With an effort he raised his arm and prodded the Chinaman again.

Jacobs fired a second time.

The bullet struck Ali in the head. He

uttered no sound. The kris slipped from his fingers and clattered on the bottom of the boat. He collapsed slowly backward, over the side of the boat and dropped into the dark water with a splash. Ripples moved away from the spot, the water closed over the slight swirl and Mary Hopkins was alone with the Chinaman and his mate. There was nothing she could do. She sat still, numb at Ali's sudden death and the turn events had taken. The two men lost no time in getting the motor started, swinging the launch around and bringing it once more to the side of the landing. The Malay picked Ali's kris up and thrust it into his belt by his own kris, a poorer one obviously.

"Get out!" Jacobs commanded roughly.

Slowly she stood up, stepped over the side, and once more was on the landing.

If the Portuguese had more cunning than his partner, he possessed less courage. His face was pasty as he stared at her. He wet his lips with the end of his tongue and then said in a shaken voice to Jacobs—

"You killed him! She saw it! You will hang!"

"So will you if she gets down-river with her information and her proof that we stole the plantation," Jacobs retorted brutally.

Vega looked around fearfully, as though the law was even then closing in on him. "What you think, what we had better do?" he asked. "Tie her up and run?"

Jacobs snorted contemptuously.

"Run? You fool! Do you think I'd have killed the Malay to keep a rope away from your neck? You'd hang—not me! I wasn't within a hundred miles of here when her brother died! Blast your fat hide, no! But I've got my fingers into the richest thing I've heard of since I've been out in this bloody part of the world! I'm going to keep them there and go home a millionaire! We've got title and we're going to keep it!" The cruel, thin lips tightened, the mask of a face set with grim purpose.

Vega stared at the shorter man in fascination.

"What—what you think to do?"

"Do?" What is there to do, you fool! Haven't you got sense enough to figure that out?"

Vega shuddered slightly.

"I like not this, this killing business. It is like pig sticking. The number grows. One, perhaps—a little so, so accident, is all right. But two, three, four, maybe five, no! I tell you, I like it not!"

"You'll like getting your neck stretched less! I've seen 'em! After you hang a while your neck goes like rubber! You can wear a high collar then! He chuckled mirthlessly.

Vega shuddered again and his face paled even more.

"What you think to do?" he asked again, with an effort.

"Find out where that damned receipt is, you gave to Hopkins when he paid you, and then couldn't find after he was dead!"

"And then—?"

"And then we'll wipe the page clean! Easy for the crocs to get 'em if a boat should happen to turn over."

Mary Hopkins could not believe her ears. No man could talk so calmly of murder. Then she realized that her brother had died, Ali had just been killed—that she was only a girl—ten full hours away from any help. Black despair began to close in about her.

"Get on up to the bungalow!" Jacobs ordered her roughly. "You, Vega, turn one of those native dugouts over and start it drifting downstream."

She looked wildly around. Vast areas of thick jungle mile on mile in every direction, an indifferent Malay, a mask-faced Chinaman, the gross Portuguese with one murder to his credit and fear of the gallows driving him on, and Jacobs, cruel-lipped, ruthless. No help—no hope.

"Hurry up!" Jacobs snapped. "And don't try to scream or make any fuss! There's no one to hear you."

He was right. There was nothing to do but obey. She started slowly up the bank. Jacobs came after, the rifle ready. Vega remained behind to set a dugout afloat, bottom side up.

JACOBS took her to the bungalow and locked her in the bedroom she had occupied.

"Don't try to break out and run away," he called curtly through the door. "I'll be watching and I'll shoot you on sight."

He went out on the veranda.

There Vega joined him. They talked in low tones. Through the thin walls Mary Hopkins could hear the drone of their voices. At times Jacobs' tones rose impatiently, but no words were distinguishable. Then one of them went away and one

remained to guard. She could hear the creak of the chair as he shifted in it.

They left her there until after the siesta hour in the afternoon. Jacobs was the cause of it—and there was method in his delay. It allowed fear to work on her mind. She got no tiffin or water to drink. As the hot afternoon hours wore on she began to feel faint and weak. She knocked on the door and asked for water, but received no reply. Finally she laid back on the bed and relaxed in silent misery.

At last the front screen opened and steps came across the main room of the bungalow and stopped at her door. A key grated in the lock.

Mary Hopkins got to her feet quickly, fighting down the feeling of panic that swept over her.

The door opened. Jacobs stepped into the room, closed it behind him, and stared at her.

"I have come for the receipt that Vega gave your brother," he said quietly. His tones were low, yet there was an undercurrent of deliberate menace in them that sent a cold feeling through her.

She did not know. She had taken a long chance and put a bluff across. Now it was working against her. To save her life she could not call the lost receipt from the place her brother had hidden it. She answered with the truth.

"I don't know where it is."

He took a step forward, said warningly: "I won't leave until I know. You might as well tell me at once. I'll get it from you finally."

She looked at his sharp features, his thin bloodless lips, his eyes. She had not really noticed his eyes before. They stared out of his mask of a face feverishly. An indication of the desperate purpose burning within him, those eyes. She watched them in fascination.

Jacobs took another step forward.

"The receipt," he said through his teeth.

The faint feeling started by a lack of food grew on her. Waves of giddiness began to radiate from her stomach. She shook her head silently and took another step back from him.

Jacobs slipped his right hand into his pocket and brought forth a small penknife. With deliberate slowness he opened it, never taking his burning eyes from her. When the naked blade was exposed he again came toward her.

The silent advance, the grim purpose in the man's face, the small blade of steel he held ready, and the knowledge that she was utterly at his mercy, swept down on the helpless girl like a great weight. She retreated until her back was against the wall. And, when he came on, the waves of giddiness welled up and enveloped her. Her knees buckled and she sank to the floor in a faint.

Jacobs swore out loud. He snapped the knife shut, stepped to her, lifted her with an effort and dumped her on the bed.

"Bring me some water!" he called to Vega.

In a moment Vega entered with a pitcher. He stopped inside the door and stared at the limp form huddled on the bed.

"What is?" he asked. "You have killed her?"

"Fainted," Jacobs answered briefly. "Give me the water."

Vega stepped to the side of the bed and handed the pitcher over. His little beady eyes were riveted on the helpless form of the girl.

"She is so, so pretty," he breathed. "Better we should keep her a little before she dies, eh?" He moistened his lips with the end of his tongue and grinned.

Jacobs cursed him.

"Get out! You started all this with your damn foolishness about women! There'll be no more of it! I want a tin mine—not a girl! Time enough for that when I get a million!"

Vega went out sullenly.

Jacobs sprinkled water on her face. When that had no effect he poured it, finally dashing the last at her. It failed to revive her. He stepped out and filled the pitcher again.

This time she came to. Her eyes opened; she stirred, stared up at the ceiling. Jacobs set the pitcher on a stand on the corner, came back and stood waiting for her to recover fully.

A NATIVE voice spoke to Vega outside. Then Vega called in excitedly: "A boat she come up the river!"

Jacobs went out hastily. The native had come up from the river bank with the news. Jacobs ordered Vega to watch the girl, and dashed down and verified the news himself.

A small launch had rounded the bend a half mile below and was plowing up against the current.

The man's face twisted with anger when he saw it. He ran for the bungalow, swearing as he went. The next five minutes were feverish ones. Jacobs took cord, bound Mary Hopkins hand and foot, and gagged her with a towel. He and Vega thrust pistols in their pockets. Then Jacobs went down to the landing to meet the launch, leaving Vega locked in the room guarding the helpless girl.

She had gathered from their excited speech that a boat was coming. Hope flamed in her breast. It changed to fear when Vega locked himself in the room with her.

But there was no need for fear at the time. The fat Portuguese was frightened. His face was pasty. He sat on a chair with his pistol in his hand and stared at the door fearfully.

They heard the faint sound of the motor coming nearer. It stilled and they knew it was at the landing. Some time passed. Then feet trod the front steps, crossed the veranda and entered the large main room of the bungalow.

Jacobs spoke.

"Have a drink."

Another answered.

Mary Hopkins' heart gave a wild leap. It was Ali's Tuan Besar that was speaking, Gilbert.

"Thanks," Gilbert said shortly. "I didn't come to drink. I came to see Miss Hopkins."

Vega's pistol hand trembled. He swallowed.

"I told you she is not here," Jacobs replied smoothly. "She made up her mind to leave at once. The motor boat was not working at the time and the Malay who was with her said they could float down all right in a native dugout. I let them have one and they started off. That's all I know. You should have met them."

A moment's silence.

"We did pass a dugout, floating bottom up," Gilbert muttered.

"It must have been the one," Jacobs said with conviction in his voice. "Perhaps it tipped them out and they made for the shore. You'll probably find them on your way down."

"They would have hailed me on the way up if they had been along the shore," Gilbert argued.

"Perhaps they had cut back in the jungle to find a path. And they might have drowned. The river is full of crocodiles, you know. All I can say is that Vega and I started them off this morning."

"Where is Vega."

Jacobs must have remembered.

"Out shooting pigeons," he said cheerfully. "He'll be along before dark."

A slight bit of courage had returned to Vega. At the mention of pigeon shooting he looked at Mary Hopkins and grinned slightly.

She lay taut, despair beginning to pull its shroud over her again.

"Why did you send her in a small dugout?" Gilbert asked angrily. "You knew something like that could happen!"

"What was I to do? She insisted on going."

"Ali should have known better," Gilbert declared heavily.

Help on the other side of the thin door—and she could make no sign. It was maddening. Mary Hopkins struggled, tried to make some sound through the heavy gag that covered her mouth.

Vega was on his feet like a cat, his heavy moist hand clutching her throat, choking off all breath and sound.

Then the front door opened and the two men went out on the veranda again. Their voices were fainter but understandable.

"You will stay all night?" Jacobs invited.

That seemed to settle the last of Gilbert's doubts.

"No. I'm going back down river. I can cover a good bit of water before darkness. If they are on the bank I want to pick them up."

"I'm sorry about it. But I don't see anything else I could have done. She would have her own way. There's the Malay boy who held the boat for them. He'll tell you they insisted on going—and did leave." Jacobs raised his voice and called.

The Malay must have been near. Jacobs addressed him in a moment.

"Mem-sahib and her man went to Kuala Bahru early, did they not?"

The man answered—"Yes, Tuan."

"There you are," Jacobs said with satisfaction.

GILBERT did not answer the remarks. But said: "That's a fine kris the man is wearing. I'd like to look at it closer."

"Here it is—help yourself," Jacobs said.

Suddenly Gilbert spoke sharply. "I thought so! This is Ali's kris."

"It can't be! It belongs to this man! Your man wore his kris away! I saw it!"

"You lie!" Gilbert snapped. "This is Ali's! His mark is on the blade! He never left the place alive, without his kris! I know—drop that gun, Jacobs, or I'll shoot you!"

A heavy object clattered on the floor of the veranda.

Vega, who had been growing more and more triumphant, paled again.

From the veranda Gilbert spoke heatedly.

"You've been lying from the first! Miss Hopkins and Ali are here! I'm going to search the place until I find them!"

"I forbid you to enter a building," Jacobs replied furiously.

"Keep your hands up! Turn your back! Order that man of yours away! If he tries to get his mates to rush me I'll shoot you like a dog!"

Gilbert's loud words were plain in the room. Vega was livid with fright. He stared at the bound girl. A thought sent him to the bed. Panting, he lifted her, let her down on the floor and pushed her far back under the bed. He pulled the top sheet over so that it hung down to the floor and acted as a curtain, hiding what was under the bed.

Gilbert stamped into the large front room of the bungalow.

"Stand over there!" he ordered Jacobs. "Don't move! I'm going to look through this place first!"

Followed the sound of a door opening. Then another. Gilbert came to the bedroom. The door was locked.

"Where is the key to this room?" he demanded.

"Vega has it. You can't get in there!"

"I think so!"

The next instant Gilbert's stout shoulder crashed heavily against the thin door. It splintered, swung in. He followed, his pistol covering the room.

Vega had backed up against the far wall. He also held his pistol ready—but when he looked into the muzzle of Gilbert's he raised both hands high.

"Don't shoot!" he implored.

"Toss your gun on the bed!"

Vega did so.

Gilbert looked about the room. Nothing was visible but the Portuguese.

"What are you doing in here?" Gilbert demanded.

Vega shrugged.

"I started to shoot pigeons—but I feel bad and slip in here and lie down. I thought you were robber."

"I think you are blackguard!" Gilbert mimicked. "Where is Miss Hopkins?"

Vega shrugged again, kept his eyes away from the bed.

"How should I know? She started down river this morning."

"Don't you start lying! Where is she?"

"I speak true. Look everywhere. Smoke house—coolie line—everywhere!"

"I'm going to! Get in the other room and join your partner!"

Vega lurched hastily across the room. Gilbert started to follow him.

Mary Hopkins had heard everything as she lay under the bed. Hope had rushed back again. Suddenly it began to recede. If Gilbert got out of the room and away she would probably never see him again. She tried to scream. Could not, and thought of rolling. She did so, awkwardly. Just as Gilbert started out of the room her bound feet pushed from under the edge of the sheet.

He saw them, stopped short, exclaimed: "What's this?" Then he dropped on his knees and threw the sheet back.

Jacobs, his eyes blazing with passion, had watched everything through the door. When Gilbert's attention went to Mary Hopkins he acted. There was a heavy pottery vase on the table. Jacobs had the vase by the neck and was through the bedroom door in a silent, swift rush. Gilbert, intent for the moment on Mary Hopkins, was caught unawares. The vase broke on his head; he slumped unconscious.

Vega stood in the doorway, not yet over his fright.

"Another," he muttered. "They come so, so fast, all time."

Jacobs made sure Gilbert was unconscious, then straightened up and snarled—"Shut up! Get some cord! We'll have to tie him and go down and fix his boat crew!

If one of them gets away we might as well go in and give up!"

"More? I tell you, I like it not!"

"Get the cord!" Jacobs' tones were so venomous that Vega went hastily.

Jacobs secured Gilbert's feet, tied his hands behind him, stood up and said briefly: "Come on—they'll be all right until we can get back to them!" The two left the bungalow.

MARY HOPKINS had been half under the bed when Gilbert was knocked out. She stayed that way until he was tied and the two partners left the room. Then she inched the rest of the way out and managed to sit up and look at Gilbert.

She was frightened when she saw a nasty wound in his scalp from which the blood streamed freely. It looked as though the skull might have caved in. But it was not. Gilbert came to his senses right after that. The first thing he saw was her eyes, fixed intently on him.

It made everything lucid. He tried to reach out, found that he was bound, and managed to struggle to a sitting posture. He grinned wryly at her.

"I don't know what happened," he said. "But it was my fault. I let them put something over on me just when I found you."

She could not answer through the gag; shook her head instead.

"Lie down behind me so I can reach that bloody towel with my fingers," Gilbert urged. "I think I can pull it down."

She obeyed him. After several futile attempts he managed to get the ends of his fingers under the edge of the towel and worked at it until it slipped down and allowed her to speak.

"Thank you," she gasped when she was upright once more.

"Did they hurt you?" He asked it fiercely.

She colored under what she read in his voice. Shook her head.

"Not yet."

"Not yet? What are those two rascals up to?"

She told him quickly.

"My brother borrowed from them; sweated blood to keep his land when rubber slumped. Then, early this year he found traces of tin on some of his land that had not been cleared."

Gilbert sat up straighter.

"Tin?" he echoed with a trace of excitement.

"Yes. He said nothing about it to anyone. You see, the land was not his entirely. He had given this Vega and his partner a claim on it until they were paid, and he was afraid they would find some way to get it from him if they suspected there was a fortune under the soil."

"I should jolly well think they would try," Gilbert murmured.

"Then they did find out. John caught Vega inspecting the tin sands.

"I had a little money—my share of our father's estate. John put his in this land; I invested mine. John cabled, explained how things were, and asked me to put my money in with his and come out and live with him. Before, when he needed it so badly, he would not ask for it might be lost. But the tin made a fortune certain. I knew it was true if John said so and I converted my investments into cash and sent it. Shortly after, I followed.

"Then—you told me John was dead—and this Vega and his partner had the plantation. I knew that he had paid them off, and they must have killed him to get the land. I came here to see what I could do. When I was ready to go this morning I foolishly told them what I knew and suspected. Jacobs shot Ali and tied me up. If you had not come—I d-don't know what would have happened. Jacobs had a knife—" She shuddered at the thought.

"Shot Ali! Tied you up!" Gilbert was furious. "The swine!" he grated, "I'll see that they measure up for that!"

"I th-think they mean to kill us also. Jacobs said he was going to become a millionaire if he had to kill everyone who tried to stop him. They've gone down to put your men out of the way now—so they can't go down to Kuala Bharu and talk."

Even as she spoke a shot rang out down on the river bank. Shouts, cries, sounded.

"The bloody murderers!" Gilbert raged. "Killing my men off!" Then, with an effort he became cool. "They'll kill us all right, if they can! We've got to get out of here!"

"How can we do that?"

"Come over with your back to me. There's a small knife in my right trousers pocket. See if you can get it out."

She wriggled into the awkward position. On the fourth attempt she got the small knife out. Gilbert turned his back to her, caught it in his fingers, and after much fumbling, got the blade open. It was easy then to saw the cords around her wrists in two. She took the knife, cut her feet loose, and then freed him.

There had been one more shot. The cries on the river bank stopped.

"I brought two men with me!" Gilbert said tensely.

Mary Hopkins rubbed her wrists, where the cords had pressed deep, and asked: "What shall we do?"

"They took my gun!"

"You were right," she told him wretchedly. "It's all my fault. If I had listened to you this wouldn't have happened."

"Hush. I would have done the same thing you did."

"You came—"

"I had to! I saw my men, told them I had important business up-river, and hurried. You see, I knew Vega and Jacobs."

"They are fiends!"

"Yes. We can't let them catch us here!"

GILBERT glanced around the room, then went to the window. "If we go out the front door they'll probably see us," he said. "We'll have to go this way."

The window was covered with screen wire. With a half dozen kicks Gilbert knocked the lower part of the wire loose. His shoulder cleared the rest of the frame.

He looked out. That side of the house was away from the coolie line and the smoke house. There was no one in sight. Neither could it have been seen from the river's edge.

Gilbert straddled the sill and dropped easily to the ground. Mary Hopkins followed. He caught her in his arms, set her down. For an instant, despite their haste, he held her close. She did not draw away.

Gilbert kissed her cheek once, fiercely.

"In case we don't come through," he said huskily.

He released her abruptly, went cautiously to the front corner of the house and looked down toward the landing. What he saw sent him back hurriedly.

"They're coming back to the house!" he burst out. "We've got to get away!"

"Where?"

The bit of cover the side of the house afforded them was all the place offered. If they went toward the rear of the clearing they would be seen by some of the Tamils. If they went out in front, even a few feet away from the side of the house they would be in sight of Vega and Jacobs. And Jacobs carried his rifle. He could stand off and shoot them down before they had done a score of yards.

Gilbert looked around desperately.

"Under the house!" he decided. "That's the only place!"

The bungalow was raised some two feet off the ground. John Hopkins had planted vines all around the house. Under the house, all was dim and shadowy.

Gilbert went near the back; parted the vines and held them while Mary Hopkins crawled through. He followed, and pulled the thick vines back in place.

It was dirty under there. Mary Hopkins suppressed a cry as a lizard scuttled across her hand. They could hear other small noises as the occupants of that space were disturbed.

"Get over near the center and lie flat on the ground," Gilbert whispered.

She did so. He joined her. They lay there motionless.

They could hear the two men plainly as they came up to the bungalow. Vega grumbled.

"It is terrible. Not one, not t'ree—but many! More all the time! Me, I would rather stay poor. I will not sleep."

Jacobs said savagely: "You'll not live if you keep spilling that kind of talk! You'll hang if one of them gets away—and I'll shoot you if you try to block my game! You're in it now—carry through!"

The feet trod on the steps, across the veranda, and then sounded plain on the floor overhead.

They stopped. Jacobs suddenly swore loudly.

"They're gone! Look at the window! They went out that way!"

His feet pounded across the floor to the window.

Vega's heavier tread followed.

"Dios!" the Portuguese wailed. "I knew it! Now we will both hang!"

"Stop it!" Jacobs ordered frantically. "They've made for the jungle! They can't be far! Let's get after them! They haven't any guns!"

He clambered out the window and

dropped to the ground. Vega followed.

Gilbert reached out in the gloom, found Mary Hopkins' hand, and pressed it tightly. The end had come for them both if Jacobs and Vega looked under the house and found them.

The vines were too thick to see out, but the voices sounded loud and clear.

"They couldn't have got to the river bank!" Jacobs snarled. "They went back toward the jungle!"

"Perhaps they are hiding in the smoke house, or with the coolies!"

"We'll search them all! Come on—and shoot if you see them!" Their steps hastened away.

Gilbert and Mary Hopkins lay tense. At last Gilbert emitted a sigh of relief and whispered: "We'll have to get out of here! One of the dogs from the coolie line is liable to smell us and start barking. If we can get to my launch and get it started down river we'll be safe. Do you want to try it?"

"Anything you think is best!"

"We'll do that then! Slip up to the front! I'll look out the back and when they are out of sight I'll give the word. Run down to the landing as fast as you can and get in my launch! I'll follow!"

She crouched behind the vines which grew along the front of the veranda. He parted the growth at the back and peered out. In a few minutes he called softly—

"Run now! They just went into the smoke house!"

She emerged by the front steps, stood up, and ran for the landing. Gilbert scrambled after her.

The river bank hid the boats from the smoke house. Mary Hopkins reached Gilbert's launch unobserved. Gilbert raced after her. As he passed over the crest of the bank the bungalow stopped shielding him. Vega, stepping out of the smoke house door, saw his shoulders and head disappearing in the direction of the landing.

GILBERT was unaware that he had been seen. But he moved as fast as he could nevertheless. As he dashed down the bank he took his knife out and opened the blade.

His launch and the plantation launch were tied with their bows upstream. The plantation launch was at the lower end of the landing.

Gilbert ran to it first, slashed the painter, and pushed it adrift. Then he cut his own boat loose, stepped in and pushed out. The current caught both launches and carried them downstream.

Gilbert cranked his motor. It caught, spluttered, and stopped.

Both launches drifted steadily on.

Jacobs appeared on the bank, carrying his rifle. He ran down to the landing. Vega followed, more slowly.

This time there was no demand to stop. Jacobs halted on the landing, aimed, and shot.

The bullet cut through the awning over their heads.

"Lie down in the bottom of the boat!" Gilbert ordered Mary Hopkins.

She did.

Gilbert worked at the engine furiously.

Jacobs shot again. The bullet knocked a shower of splinters from the rail. One cut Gilbert's cheek. He paid no attention to it. Cranked at the motor desperately.

The launch was drifting farther away every second.

Jacobs aimed a long time for the third shot. It barked out. Gilbert had been crouching over the motor. The bullet struck his right arm below the elbow and broke the bone. He staggered, groaned, and clutched his useless arm.

Mary Hopkins got to her feet when she saw him stagger.

Before she could do anything Jacobs fired the fourth time. The bullet creased Gilbert's scalp. He toppled forward over the motor.

Jacobs gave a yell of triumph and shouted to Vega.

Mary Hopkins was not crying—but her heart was breaking. She tried to get Gilbert off the motor. He was heavy; she could hardly move him.

Vega and Jacobs had dashed on shore. Below the landing several small native dugouts were drawn up half out of the water. Vega scrambled into the bow of one. Jacobs pushed out and leaped into the stern.

There were two curved paddles in the boat. Each took one and began to paddle madly toward the launch.

Mary Hopkins finally got the limp form of Gilbert back off the motor. The effort left her breathless. Gasping, she seized the crank and turned.

The dugout pushed swiftly through the water toward the drifting launch.

Mary Hopkins uttered a wild silent prayer. She spun the crank as best she could.

The dugout was not more than a score of feet away.

The motor spit, backfired, began to hum steadily. The propeller lashed the water. The launch hesitated, began to move through the water. Mary Hopkins rushed up forward to the small steering wheel.

Jacobs cursed wildly at Vega. They redoubled their efforts. The dugout approached rapidly.

The launch gathered headway, swept out toward the middle of the river. The dugout held even. Then began to fall behind.

Jacobs suddenly dropped his paddle. seized his rifle, sprang to his feet and aimed at the girl.

His move rocked the craft.

Vega felt it. He looked over his shoulder. Saw Jacobs about to shoot. He threw his heavy bulk sideways out of range. The tricky little craft rolled clear over. The shot from the rifle went wild as the two men fell into the water.

Mary Hopkins looked around when the rifle went off. She saw what had happened. Saw Vega come up and flounder wildly. Saw Jacobs trying to swim clumsily to the dugout, which had drifted away.

It was plain that Vega could not swim, and Jacobs very little. They both would probably drown. She watched them tensely. Then, hardly knowing what she did, save that two humans could not drown before her eyes, she brought the launch around in a sharp circle and headed it back toward the struggling pair.

Vega gave a wild cry. His arms went up. His body was suddenly dragged under.

Jacobs heard the cry. Lashed the water frantically in an effort to get to the overturned dugout.

The launch bore down on him swiftly.

He screamed shrilly. A second scream was smothered as the dark water closed over his head. There was a swirl. A great scaly tail broke the surface of the water and disappeared.

The launch plowed over the spot.

Once more the river flowed serenely and there was but two launches and an overturned dugout on its surface.

MARY HOPKINS got the motor shut off. And then the tears came. She couldn't stop them, didn't try as she knelt by Gilbert's limp form. His broken arm was covered with blood. His head had two wounds and the thick red fluid had streaked down over his forehead. But his heart was still beating.

That went a long way toward stopping the wracking sobs. She managed to slip his belt off and make a tourniquet above the elbow with it.

She was holding it with one hand, and wiping the blood from his forehead with her handkerchief, when he came out of the blackness into which the grazing bullet had sent him.

He struggled up and sat on the seat by her, wincing as the pain shot through his broken arm.

"What happened?" he asked weakly.

She told him.

"The crocodiles got them," he said slowly. "Then they can't threaten you any more—thank God."

He was on her right, and he put his good left arm about her and drew her close.

The launch drifted on.

They were almost down to the bend before either noticed.

"We'll have to get the motor started, pick the other launch up and get back to the plantation," he said a trifle sheepishly.

"Yes—your arm," she agreed, suddenly remembering.

Gilbert winced as the pain darted through it. Then he tightened the arm that was about her.

"Yes, my arm," he agreed cheerfully.

She snuggled closer.

The launch drifted on.

"Ho, Sally Brown's a bright mulatto,
Way, hay, Roll and go!
Ho, she drinks rum and chews tobacco:
Spend my money on Sally Brown."

*A New Sea Story*

*By* CAPTAIN DINGLE

# *Roll and Go*

FLYING fish glittered about the bows of the *Leda,* homeward bound from Hobart Town. Little clouds like tufts of wool mottled the blue overhead. Tiny white wavelets speckled the deep blue of the sea. White wavelets, and little golden streamers of weed, and the silver shafts of the flying fish. In the west a faint film against the horizon faded with the passing of a liner. In the east, a slanting gleam of sail seemed to hang suspended, so motionless was it. Midway, a barnacled old bull whale lazily rolled, every now and then slapping the water with the broad flukes of his tail. The report of it echoed and re-echoed from horizon to horizon.

The ship wore her thinnest, most threadbare dress: the old, light weather sails of the tropics. Bleached white they were, by years of use; they held the sunlight gloriously, all gold and mauve in the soft swelling of their curves; the gentle breeze filled them with whisperings; the ship was a soft harmony of color and sound, slipping through the azure seas with the gentlest of ripples at the bow, the softest of gurgles at the run, where the divided waters met again after her passage.

For all the softness of the breeze the *Leda* sailed fast. She was that sort of ship. Men liked to sail in the *Leda.* She had many a fine passage to her credit; since she was built to try to stem the encroachments of steam, she had splendidly justified her builder's boast that it would be many a year before the *Leda* was forced from the freight runs by steamers. More than once she had beaten a steamer across. Her original owner, old Cappy Gurney, maintained to the end of his life that she would pay a profit as long as she was sailed as he sailed her. And his twin sons, Bob and Joe, were the lads to make good on that. While he lived and commanded his ship, the sons learned their craft with him. They got their certificates: masters both before twenty; and sailed as mate and second mate under him, knowing that when the old sea warrior was weary of the sea the ship would be theirs to command.

It was a queer arrangement right along. So that no jealousy might creep into the intimate relationship of the twin brothers, old Cappy made them alternate in the senior position voyage by voyage. It was queer after the old fellow died. He died peacefully at sea in a Cape Horn gale; was buried off the Ramirez in a blizzard with a

gentle smile frozen on his face. But that was as he preferred to go. Bob and Joe launched him in his canvas shroud without a qualm other than the natural one of filial bereavement. And by that time, so used to the alternating arrangement had they become, they saw nothing queer in the last wish he had expressed in the simple will they found in his navigation tables. It was queer, just the same.

The *Leda* was theirs, to own and sail in common. If one died, the survivor inherited the share of the deceased brother. That was all right. And it seemed quite all right that they continue to alternate in command, voyage by voyage, as they had alternated the position of chief mate before. Nothing had ever entered their healthy young lives to cause the slightest irritation between them. Nor did it seem likely anything would. Still, a man who sails master one voyage, and mate the next, master and mate, voyage after voyage, in a ship of which he is half owner, needs to be a remarkable character to survive and retain his equable balance.

Bob and Joe were remarkable characters. Bob was skipper and Joe mate on this fair passage when, at starting, the flying fish, the breeze and the blue sea sported in a golden splendor and the ship sailed fast without a tremor. Bob and his twin were as unlike as daylight and dark, physically. Bob was dark, debonair. Joe had developed a sturdier body than his brother; was a decided blond, and to anybody not knowing him seemed unfriendly, grim. Yet men liked Joe best. His sailors believed he was the Old Man come back again. Men got along with Bob, too, for Bob was a fine seaman. But Bob Gurney was rather of the sort to attract women, although women had never before bothered him to the extent of making him less brotherly or less of a sailorman. It was as natural as day following night for them to succeed one another as master of the *Leda;* as natural as night following day for one to succeed the other as mate, and no more jarring.

JOE GURNEY'S face was grimmer than usual as he superintended the shifting of a split mainsail. The sails were old. But the tropics are fine for old sails. The canvas is lighter; more susceptible to the gentler breezes. An air that would not stir the heavier canvas bent for the Horn

could fill to soft rotundities the threadbare old stuff and send the ship along like a ghost. The big mainsail was made up in stops, all ready to be hoisted. Men waited on the footropes of the mainyard, while the bosun hitched the gantline. And along from the poop floated the voice of skipper Bob.

"Start a song as you send it up, m' lads."

Unthinking, eager to please, a young ordinary seaman piped up lustily:

"Way-hay, up she rises! Way-hay, up she rises! Hooraw, up she rises, early in the morning!"

"Stow that!" ordered Chief Mate Joe angrily. He was able to supervise the job without help from aft. The youngster stopped singing, and hauled with the rest of the men, silently, grinning a bit.

"What's wrong, there?" Bob called out. "Carry on singing. Miss Jean wants to hear a chantey."

"There's nothing here to call for a chantey," Joe shouted back, and bade his men get a move on.

The sail was bent and set in silence. But the little passage of arms showed how the wind blew.

Standing beside Bob on the poop was a girl; a very pretty, sunny, pleasant girl: and Captain Bob Gurney had laid himself out to gratify her every whim. It was the first time he had ever been interested in a girl to any extent. When an old friend of their father's had asked them to give his niece Jean a passage, the brothers had considered before agreeing. Perhaps had Joe been master that voyage Jean Shane might have gone home by steamer. But the old friend said the girl needed a long sea voyage without the routine of liner life; Bob caught one glimpse of Jean at a moment when she looked past him at the glorious fabric of the old clipper, and swung his weight on her side in the ensuing discussion with Joe. He was certain that the light dancing in her eyes had been lit by him.

But it was to Joe she first went after settling down on board, full of vivacious curiosity to know all about sailing ships and how to sail them. For two days all seemed to go well. Bob sparkled, shone at his best. Joe, the mate, was too good a sailor to let a girl's presence in the ship make him forget his position. He kept aloof, answering the girl's bubbling questions civilly but with brevity. Only when Bob began to dress up, to put on an air of gallantry, to unblushingly set out to make a hit with Miss Jean Shane, did Joe begin to resent the disagreeable change that had abruptly come into the tranquil policy of their joint command.

Bob Gurney developed a wonderful liking for the big tropic moon, the dazzling tropic stars. Jean liked them, too. Romance to her was, at present, more a matter of such externals than anything of a personal nature. She would stand or sit with Bob for hours, bathed in moonlight, following avidly as he pointed out the constellations. And as day followed day, and the ship sped on homeward with fresh, fair winds and smooth, kindly seas; and night followed night with its stars and its broad waxing moon, those little studies in astronomy took on a comfortably intimate aspect which made Bob Gurney preen himself like a pouter pigeon. He began to raise a smart mustache. He allowed Jean to steer the ship, for the *Leda* was as sea kindly as a small yacht in the ladies' weather that persisted.

Sometimes it was in Joe's watch that she wanted to steer. Joe stood behind her as she handled the big wheel, looking so small and dainty as she reached up for the top spoke; he watched over her like an old quartermaster watching a green hand; he made suggestions, not often, for Jean was an apt pupil; but when necessary, in terse, officerlike terms. The girl tried at first to stir him into something like human life with her merry spirit, but she gave that up. Leaving the wheel, she gave the course to the relief in tones as terse as Joe's, making a mock salute with great gravity. And Joe sometimes gazed after her with smoldering fires in his eyes which were not fires of anger.

IT WAS when the winds began to blow with stouter gusts that the *Leda* showed her quality. Old sails gave place to heavy new canvas; running gear that had been good enough for the milder breezes was replaced with new yellow manila that shone like gold against the black of the rigging. There was a croon in the wires and a roar in the seas; spray on the air, and a taste of salt on the lips of hardy folks who faced it. Jean Shane faced it, bright-eyed and eager, watching the sailors

at their dizzy work, high on the reeling spars, listening with rapt ears and moving lips to the time-mellowed chanteys that helped the work. As yet no other change had come into the weather than just a hardening of the breeze. The sun still shone in a blue sky; birds took the place of the flying fish, truly, and perhaps the blue was a bit steely; but there was no storm imminent, and the *Leda* spun the knots astern of her like a racer.

"Ho, Sally Brown's a bright mulatto.
Way-hay, Roll and go!
Ho, she drinks rum and chews tobacco:
Spend my money on Sally Brown."

Four men briskly pumped the trifling leakage of twenty-four hours at the midship pump. Other men aloft bent the last of the stout sails to the main upper topgallant yard. By the time they were finished the pumps would suck, and the pumpers be ready to man the halliards to hoist the yard.

"Oh, Sally Brown I long to see you:
Way-hay, Roll and go:
I tell you true I'll not deceive you;
Spend my money on Sally Brown."

Far out on the lee beam a feather of smoke seemed to hang in the blue of the sky like a curl. It had been there all day. The day before it was ahead.

"When will the sailors sing again?" Jean wanted to know as Captain Bob joined her. He turned from scanning that distant smoke through the glasses.

"They'll chantey that t'gallant yard aloft, then you'll see that smoke slip away astern," he smiled proudly. "That's the steamer that sailed same day as we did, Jean. She passed us by in the light winds, but—watch our old lady go now!"

Bob strutted. He was proud. There was Joe overlooking the work; solid, grim, perhaps as proud, but incapable of strutting.

"Is Joe shy?" Jean asked with a laugh. She had caught the eye of Joe, and Joe scowled, turning away with a gruff command to the men.

"Shy?" echoed Bob. "Sore, I should say! Never mind him. There they go! They're going to hoist away."

Men tailed on to the halliards and the chanteyman started. Jean could no longer bother with Joe and his scowl. To her, a chantey was breath of the sea. She missed none of them that were sung in waking hours. She knew some of the choruses already.

"As I was a-walking down Ratcliffe Highway,
To my Way-hay-hay Ho!
A saucy flash packet I chanced to espie;
'T was a long time ago!

I tipped her my towrope and took her in tow;
To my Way-hay-hay Ho!
And yardarm to yardarm away we did go;
'T was a long time ago!"

"Darned if you can't sing as well as my sailors," chuckled Bob, laying a hand on Jean's shoulders. She had scarcely known she was joining in. "Next time we have any hoisting on the mizzen you ought to be chanteyman. How about it?"

The girl laughed not quite happily. Captain Bob had developed a habit of putting his hands on her lately, and she was not sure she liked that. Not that Bob Gurney was offensive; he was all right; later on, perhaps, she might not have felt it worth while to object. She had quit taking astronomy lessons on account of it, though. When Joe returned to resume his watch on the poop, the work being finished and the ship now foaming under full sail, she moved across to walk beside him, heedless of the frank displeasure on the skipper's face.

"Do you think we can pass that steamer now?" she smiled up at Joe. He tried to seem detached; but a tiny deepening of the rich color of his cheek betrayed him. He did like the girl to come to him for her information.

"If we can't, Miss Jean, I'll sell my share soon as we get home," he said. It was a pleasant theme for Joe. The old *Leda* to him was a sea queen, perfection, unbeatable. He glanced at the steamer's smoke, stepped to the binnacle for a bearing of it, and showed her how to determine how fast the steamer was being beaten by watching the bearing change.

And it did change. When Joe left the deck to the second mate at supper time the feather of smoke was well over the lee quarter. Jean watched him pass her door, and felt glad that he could look so cheerful. Joe's door was heard to open after he shut it; and the saloon seemed to be filled with angry voices. Jean put her head out, scarcely believing. But there could be no doubt. Above the creaking of

woodwork, the tinkle of glass; running through all the hum of racing seas outside the ship's skin, and the stress of the leaning hull was the sound of wordy quarreling. The old steward, relic of Old Cappy Gurney's best days, stood in his pantry doorway staring across at Joe's door; and, seeing the girl, glowered at her in a fashion which plainly said he blamed her for the brothers' first quarrel.

At the table, a few minutes later, Bob laid himself out to entertain Jean. He was debonair, sparkling. Joe sat silent and gloomy, eating as much as ever, but looking in front of him unless spoken to, when he answered gruffly with the briefest of glances. It was clear that Captain Bob was doing nothing to calm the troubled waters. Jean sat in uneasy apprehension, always expecting an outburst. But Joe finished his supper, waited for her to rise, then went to his room. Bob took her on deck to look for the steamer again.

BUT it was grim, shy Joe to whom Jean went when she was lonely; Bob was too much given to sentiment, or to outward show of it. He would answer her eager questions about ships and the sea, but always with a hint that there were more interesting topics. Joe never sheered wide of the course of conversation. His deep, somber eyes glowed as he told her little bits of old sea lore. There was no more interesting topic to Jean: nor to Joe.

"If somebody aboard a ship forgot to pay his laundry bill before sailing, that ship meets bad luck," said Joe with a quiet grin one early morning.

"Oh, is that why the steamer passed us after all?" she laughed. The steamer had gone out ahead the day after the *Leda* first passed her, the wind falling light. Joe laughed too as he answered her.

"Put two and two together, Miss Jean." He glanced toward the galley, where the doctor was sharpening a long knife, and at the pigsty in the longboat. "But that'll be changed after the pig's killed."

"Oh, now you're fooling me!" cried Jean, looking straight into his eyes. Joe colored a bit; but he warmed to that look.

"Wait and see," he said. "Kill a pig with his head to the nor'west, and if it don't bring a fine breeze—you'd better run down below if you don't like to see it. Hope you won't refuse to eat a bit o' fresh pork for dinner."

Perhaps the pig's squeal did it. Whatever the cause, the wind came fair and bustling before the first joint of pork was on the table. Jean jested with Joe about it over the meal. She did not refuse roasted fresh pork either. But Brother Bob was unpleasantly sarcastic concerning chief mates whose heads were full of nonsense, and who filled other people's heads with the same.

"I don't care, I like to hear those old stories," Jean said, decidedly. "You only tell me about stars and moons and stuff I can read in books. I want to hear all about things that are passing from the sea with the clipper ship. Joe tells me lots of things that are priceless."

It was unfortunate. The brothers had another wordy set-to after dinner; and it was bitter. The old steward shook his grizzled head sorrowfully as Joe's door slammed and the skipper stamped up the stairs determined to look all over the ship for something to hang a reprimand on. He had told Joe he neglected his duty to fill a girl's head with nonsense. Joe had slowly retorted to that:

"Not as mate to master, Robert, but as partner to partner, you're a durned liar. I neglect nothing o' my duty."

And Bob, in his swifter, more glittering way had snapped:

"Not as master to mate, Joseph, nor as partner to partner, but as one man to another, I'll hammer seven-bells out o' you if I catch you talking to Jean in your watch on deck again!"

It was big, stolid Joe's contemptuous snort that sent Bob up seeking trouble. The steward started up the stairway after him. He knew the twins from babyhood, through boyhood, to manhood; knew their little faults and their many virtues; had made them their first toy ships out of soap, with macaroni spars and sails made of the silver paper from raisin boxes. They had eaten the raisin crew he shipped, informing him in all childish seriousness that a big whale had swallowed the sailors. Surely such an old servant might speak a word or two to one of those boys grown into a very angry man.

Yet the steward paused. Captain Bob was very angry. He could be heard at that moment, above the rising song of the

strong wind, berating the second mate for something or other about the ship's trim. The ship lurched heavily, clattering the dishes in the pantry, and a sharp scattering spray rattled against the skylight and companionway. The steward ran to take care of his gear. That was enough for him to attend to. Let navigators take care of their own business.

The second mate came below at eight-bells, irritable and restive. The skipper remained on deck, still watching for a chance to trip up Joe. But Joe ignored him, attending to his job as mate, seeing to it that the ship lost no advantage given by the increasing gale. As evening came on the *Leda* was plunging through steep seas under leaning spars and cracking canvas, her maindeck roaring with broken water from time to time. Still Joe kept the royals on her. He knew the old clipper; what she could do; how much she could stand; and he thrilled to the leap of her.

Jean appeared, bright-eyed and buoyant, wrapped against cold and eager to enjoy the tremendous spectacle of a lofty ship full-sailed in a quartering gale. She made a funny little stumbling run over to Joe, laughing joyously as he caught her at the rail.

"Have we caught up with the steamer yet?" she cried. The gale whipped her scarf across her eyes and Joe had to hold her until she could see to stand alone. He felt very big and protective then. She panted from her unexpected run, too.

"What did I tell you?" shouted Bob, striding across the poop. His face was dark with passion. "Get the royals off before you lose me some spars! Miss Jean, you must not speak to the officer of the watch. Here, I'll help you to the weather screen."

"I don't need help," Jean cried, and made another tottery little run to the shelter of the canvas dodger to prove it. Bob bit his lip. His growing black mustache bristled. And as if conspiring to flout him before her Joe retorted to his outburst:

"Our agreement says, neither one interferes with the other in matters o' watch keeping or sail carrying. She can carry the royals, easy."

Bob turned pale with fury. He made a step as if to attack Joe, thought better of it, and rushed to the mizzen royal halliards, flinging down the coil and starting to cast off the turns from the pin, bawling out to the watch huddled in the lee of the galley.

"Let-go fore and main royals and furl 'em!"

"Keep all fast!" roared Joe, and plunged headlong across to where Bob was about to snatch the last turn free. The two men were mixed in a tangle of rope and striving bodies; Jean looked on, half puzzled, half afraid. The man at the wheel grinned. The watch stood gaping. The steward, his gear secure, ran up in time to see the brothers struggling together, and the girl looking on wide-eyed.

The mizzen royal flapped. Bob had started the halliards, and the yard jerked down a foot, slackening the sail and making the lofty, slender spar whip and quiver. Bob cursed. Joe strove in grim silence. All he wanted to do was to stop the yard coming down farther. Then the rope surged, slipped from the pin, and the coils leaped upward. What exactly happened was doubtful; but Bob's feet suddenly flew up, his head flew down, and in thirty seconds he lay on the deck stunned and to all appearance dead. Jean and the old steward bumped together at his side.

"A crool blow, it wos! I 'eard 'is 'ead come wop on the blessed 'ard deck!" the steward declared, raising Bob's head and finding the small hand of the girl already there.

THEY carried Bob to his room, and Joe set the mizzen royal again before going down to see him. Jean was there. She gave Joe a look of dark reproach as he entered. The steward's expression plainly told that something serious was the matter.

"I think it's concussion," Jean whispered. "Why did you do it? He's very likely going to die."

"I? I didn't do anything," Joe stammered, looking on like a great boy caught in a childish fault. The girl only shook her head, devoting her attention to Bob, who lay there like a corpse, pallid and still.

There was wind enough that night. Joe remained on deck long after he was relieved, seeming dazed. He carried sail like a madman. The foretopgallant split in the middle watch; the royal and the spars were

almost gone before the men could get aloft to secure them.

"Bend a new t'gallants'l and set it. Set the royal again," said Joe. And men battled up there in the howling blackness, cursing the mate who had gone mad, so they believed. Joe went to Bob's room again in the early dawn, and found Jean still there, looking wan and weary, but still able to show him unmistakably that she thought him guilty.

"Bob'll die unless you get him into skilled hands quickly," she said. "He's rigid. Paralysed, I... He hasn't moved a muscle since he was brought in."

The saloon hummed with the roar of the seas. On the main deck men sought what shelter they might against the lean gray combers that crashed aboard in the waist. The carpenter hammered wedges into the storm doors of the saloon; and in the reeling interior the motion grew terrific. Every crash of sea was echoed by some smaller crash of rolling or falling gear. And the pale daylight held only promise of more wind. Joe stood gazing down at his brother with somber eyes. Jean watched him secretly. She could not pretend to understand every phase of this big, grim, shy man. But she saw his furrowed brow, and his moving lips. She knew the situation existing between the twins; and from all the old steward had told her she gathered that never before this voyage had they ever quarreled seriously.

"Couldn't you put him on a steamer?" she asked. "He'll surely die if he doesn't have attention. I saw a case like it once before."

"I'll get him under care as quick as I can," muttered Joe, and went on deck again to drive the old *Leda* as she had rarely been driven. Through a day of rising squalls, each leaving the gale a bit harder than it was before, the ship stormed forward. She was a driving, drenched, staggering thing, her decks awash so that the galley could not be opened, her bows hidden in a cloud of flying sprays, roaring like thunder in the overturn of the lee wave. Fourteen knots she was logging. Except for the flying jib and gaff topsail she carried everything she could set; men shivered at sight of her straining upper spars; two men fought with her kicking helm, sweating though wet to the skin with water growing more bitterly cold hourly; Joe Gurney stood braced against the poop rail, scowling darkly, his powerful hands white at the knuckles from the desperation of his grip on the teak. The man was like a rugged effigy in granite rather than a human being, so fixedly stony was his gaze, so rigidly unbending his attitude. He never left the deck all day; the steward brought him food where he stood.

In late afternoon the steamer they had so often sighted was seen again ahead. A good, honest old ten knotter she was. And black greasy smoke belched from her stack. The sea was churned yeastly under her stern. She squattered and wallowed and rolled. Still the *Leda* foamed up to her. In two hours she was near enough to speak with flags. Joe gave her but a glance.

"Signal to ask her if there's a doctor aboard," he told the second mate, and turned to give all his attention to his own ship. Jean had come up on hearing of the steamer's nearness, and she looked indignant at what she considered his indifference. Joe never looked at her. A jib exploded in the driving spray mists forward, and the flogging of it shook the foremast. Men were out there muzzling the fragments almost before Joe could utter the order.

"Save the sail!" he roared. "Bend a new one and set it. Get a move on!"

The second mate and a seaman hoisted the signal. The steamer had no doctor. She had no wireless. She was just a small freight tramp without much of anything except shame at being overhauled by a windjammer.

"But you'll put Bob aboard, surely?" Jean stammered. "We're beating the steamer now, but she will beat us in the end."

Joe looked at the turmoil of sea running between the vessels.

"Can't shift him in this sea. And I can beat that steamer. Go below and rest. A lot'll depend on you."

When darkness fell, the sailing ship had passed the steamer. Joe himself watched the log hove. Fifteen knots she was making. But men grumbled. One timorous soul would have let-go the royal halliards, thinking that Joe was going off watch. But Joe told that man something. No halliards were started. Joe himself lay down in the chartroom for two hours; then was out

again. And the steamer's lights were astern. The wind blew tremendously. A sea lopped over the rail and picked up the longboat, taking it back to the sea in a bundle of staves, straws, and squealing pigs.

And Bob Gurney lay like a corpse. His lips were blue. He had no more semblance of life than the figurehead at the clipper's stem. Only a mirror held to his lips told of lingering life. Joe went to look at him for just a moment on waking again, and Jean watched the grim face bent upon the stiff figure in the bed. Bob's skin was like plaster. His small, black, growing mustache looked pitiful. There was nothing on Joe's face to betray his innermost feelings. Grim, salt puckered, tight lipped, he gazed at his twin for the space of a long breath, then made room for the girl who waited with aromatic salts and hot water cloths to renew her efforts to arouse Bob. At the door Joe half turned for a brief instant. He glanced at Jean's small figure, bent low over Bob, he could see her dainty hands fluttering; her fine profile was like a cameo of pain. Joe closed the door and went on deck, his lips a bit tighter, his face a bit more grim.

IN THE chartroom he examined the old reading with the regular entries in the mercurial barometer, comparing the log. He read and set the aneroid, not that he depended on any such newfangled gadget, but that he might miss no aid in his weather readings. That night, at the darkest hour, the mizzen topgallant mast went, and with it t'gallants'l and royal, with their staysails, and the braces of the upper yards of the main.

Joe drove both watches to the verge of mutiny. Not merely to secure the wreckage did he drive them, himself doing the work of two men; but a jury spar must be fitted and sent aloft, yards crossed again, and every stitch of lost canvas replaced before one man dare take breath. Through the night the ship battled her stormy way. At dawn the men were given grog; and the weary sea warriors flung themselves down to snatch a few winks of sleep before something else was carried away by the driving of the sleepless madman in command. Once more, at dawn, Joe entered Bob's room. Jean slept on the settee, but arose as he entered.

"He hasn't moved," she whispered. Joe almost smiled. And she wondered. He nodded and returned to the deck.

As if to mock him, the wind abruptly fell away to a mild breeze with the sunrise. By noon the ship made a bare four knots and by evening the steamer flaunted her greasy smoke once more on the sternward sky. The steward brought coffee and biscuit up to Joe; saw the smoke; in five minutes Jean appeared, heavy-eyed, drooping with weariness, looking at the smoke. Joe stood at the chart table, his somber eyes fastened upon the barometer as he gulped scalding coffee. Amidships, now the decks were free of water, a gang of men ground around the pump wheel.

"Oh, farmer Brown I love your daughter,
Way-hay, Roll and go:
For her I'd cross the stormy water,
Spend my money on Sally Brown!"

Jean touched Joe's arm, a little bit timidly; but there was something like resolution in her small, delicate face.

"Joe, you'll send Bob to that steamer now the wind's fallen, won't you?"

Joe crunched on a flinty pantile, gulping noisily a mouthful of softening coffee. He did not look at her, but Jean could see the furrows deepen between his eyes. The steamer came up swiftly, traveling nearly three fathoms to the *Leda's* one. And there was a red glow in the sky. There seemed to be every sign of fine weather. Perhaps some of the red was coppery; maybe the lower clouds had the tufted, greasy form which in greater degree would presage hard winds and stormy weather. But it would need an expert and solicitous eye, a close study of the mercury during the foregoing twenty-four hours to see anything but fine weather in that twilight sky.

"How much do you care?" he demanded hoarsely. Hard biscuit and weariness had much to do with the hoarseness, truly; but to Jean it was eloquent of something else. She had not missed any of Joe's somber looks. Perhaps when she first stepped aboard the *Leda* she had never given serious thought to the ways of men with a maid. Jean was full woman, and possessed feminine allure in a delicious degree. Perhaps she knew it, perhaps not. But she could never remain ignorant of the fact that the twins had quarreled because of her presence there. The old steward took

care she knew that. And it was the old steward who told her that ship and command went to whichever brother survived the other. Joe's sudden question raised all sorts of dark suspicions in her mind. It would be so easy to let Bob die. Just keeping him aboard the *Leda* would do it.

"How much do you care, Jean?" he asked again.

"Why," she said, embarrassed, "I care the same as any decent person cares when a friend is suffering. I'm not sure that Bob will ever recover consciousness, but he might have a chance if you do your part, Joe."

"Go down and do the best you can for him," Joe answered shortly, and left her there in the chartroom staring after him dubiously.

The steamer passed. By midnight the *Leda* rolled dizzily on a steep swell, her sails slapping hollowly. There was just air enough to move her; and Joe altered course, heading her away toward a blacker line in the dark horizon.

Rain came, and Joe almost smiled. Then calm; and squall after squall of rain. But as yet only sickening spells of rolling calm between. In the saloon Jean and the old steward talked in murmurs, of Joe, of Bob, of the chances. Jean was unhappy. She half muttered her thoughts aloud.

"Don't you think nothin' like that!" the old steward cried. "Joe ain't that sort of a swab. Maybe we don't understand wot's in his mind, but never you believe he's goin' to do Bob dirt. No ma'am!"

Jean looked glad, rather surprisingly. She had done all her limited nursing knowledge suggested, and Bob lay without a tremor. She was beginning to be frightened. The only dead man she had ever seen before had looked dead. There lay Bob Gurney, not so much like a dead man as a plaster figure miraculously imbued with power to breathe faintly. Then the old steward's chatter had not been reassuring until she herself uttered half formed suspicions. The ship rolled, too. The rain squalls slashed against the skylights, drummed on the deck overhead, hissed in the sea all around. It was darkest night. She was weary to death. Altogether Jean was in receptive mood for gloomy fears. The old steward's surprising championship of Joe revived her. She drank tea which he gave her and lay down once more in Bob's room, trying to clear her mind of unpleasant things.

But through her sleep ran the certainty that the *Leda* was rolling on a glassy swell, while the steamer that might have saved Bob, ploughed on far ahead. She was awakened by being hurled from the couch to the floor, to find the ship heeling giddily, and to hear uproar overhead with Joe's powerful voice dominating all. She put on a coat as soon as she found her feet and clambered up the companionway to the deck. An awful grandeur enveloped her there.

JOE stood at the helm himself. The skies were sooty black, great seas had arisen magically, they roared high above the rails as the ship was hurled onward. On mastheads and yardarms blazed blue corposants, wavering, running along the spars to the ends. All hands clustered either on the poop or the ladders leading to it. Even the doctor was there; and when a ship's cook emerges of his own free will at midnight to face the elements, those elements must be uncommonly forceful.

Jean clung to the handrail against the companion-house. Joe stood like a rock, holding the wheel in a coldly steady grip, his eyes aloft, striving to penetrate the murky blackness so vividly emphasized by the flickering glow of the corposants. Out of the night a fiercer squall shrieked. The ship heeled. Untold tons of sea poured over the lee rail, and one of the poop ladders unshipped and spilled its occupants helter-skelter into the chaos of the waist.

"He's drowned us all!" screamed the doctor. As if to prove him right a sea burst the galley from its fasts and tossed the pieces out to sea. A piece of the roof, with stovepipe still stuck through, fouled the lower part of the main brace and hung there like an evil bat of night.

"Gorn mad to spite 'is bruvver!" piped a half crazed sailor whose head was wrapped in a bloody bandage ever since the last stupendous piece of rigging work aloft. And like periods sent to punctuate his moan the three royals burst in swift succession, one, two, three, like gunshots.

"Up and cut them adrift!" roared Joe. "Quick, before the spars go!"

The steward crawled up, said something to Jean, and she in turn clawed her perilous way to the helm.

"The cabins are flooded! Steward says it'll kill Bob!"

Joe uttered a crazy laugh. Never looked at her.

"Bob don't know," he rasped. "Nothing'll hurt him. Go below, sister."

Jean shivered. She stayed but a moment, then obeyed him. She could do nothing.

"Oh, Sally Brown's the queen of ladies,
Way-hay, Roll and go!
Her house is full of yaller babies,
Spend my money on Sally Brown!"

A gang of muttering men pumped through the night. And the *Leda* flew. Voices shriller than the rest told of men in an extremity of stress.

They saw the steamer once more. In the midst of a tearing blast of wind, shot through with lightning, bitter with hail, so murky with flying spume that the steamer looked like a gray ghost, her lights like evil eyes, the storming clipper roared past so close that men's voices could be heard bawling in terror.

The lee wave of the clipper thundered against the iron side of the steamer, flinging sprays high over her bridge. Then she was swallowed in the sternward pall of storm, to be seen no more by the *Leda*. And Joe Gurney stood there at the helm until he could not stand longer. When his eyes shut in spite of him he lay down right there at the wheel. Men slept as they might in the lee of the companionway. The steward gave them rum four times a day. When a sail burst, it was secured and the ship carried what was left until another went. When a towering sea picked up the lee lifeboat from the gallows and floated it through the lee corner of the poop rail and so to sea, Joe bade the men make the remaining boat more secure. Down below Jean watched Bob with fascinated eyes. She held the mirror to his lips more often now. The slight dulling of the glass grew less perceptible.

So in the morning of a blusterous, snowy day, the *Leda* rounded the Horn, heading up for the Falklands. Joe muttered for the wind to hold. But his haggard face told of his physical distress. Men had ceased talking about him. They did their work like automata, afraid to disobey the gaunt specter who drove them. And they came to Port Stanley on the dying blasts of the gale. Flags flew from her rigging, calling a medical man out to the *Leda*. One glance satisfied the doctor.

"He's dead," he said. Jean told him of the mirror. He smiled patiently. "It must have been your own breath, miss. Sorry I can't do anything for him."

Joe uttered a grim, rattling laugh and sat down heavily. Jean looked into his drawn, heavy face and was shocked. Only then did she know what Joe must have endured to drive the ship to port.

"And I thought—" she stammered.

"I know," rasped Joe. "But I did my best to save your man for you, Jean. 'Twasn't my fault he died. And it wasn't by me he was hurt, either."

"I know, the steward told me the rope knocked him down," said Jean with a moist glow in her pitying eyes. She placed her hand on Joe's bowed head. "We couldn't save him. You did right in refusing to put him on that steamer, Joe. But Bob wasn't my man. I liked him, but—"

Joe looked up, meeting her soft gaze that held so much of womanly sympathy for him in his distress. She took his hand in both of hers and pressed it so that he stood up, straightening his drooping shoulders. And there was light of hope, encouragement, in his weatherbeaten face as he turned to give the necessary orders concerning his ship and the brother neither he nor the grand old *Leda* had been able to save.

***Preceding events briefly retold***

Doctor MacKinnon, a craggy Scot, who has lived many years in Pekin and learned the Chinese language and customs, is endeavoring to find out who are the ringleaders of a secret society. He knows the Society of the Silver Shoe is being organized to exterminate all foreigners in China. His aids in this task are Randal Archer of the American Legation and Captain Sir John Raikes of the British Legation Guards. They know that MacKinnon's compradore, Tong, is a member of the Silver Shoe and arrange for Archer, who is very proficient in Chinese, to shadow him in native costume and ascertain the society's meeting place. After patient watching Archer accomplishes his task and all three arrange to attend the meeting.

MacKinnon has previously searched Tong's belongings and found a small silver shoe, which is the token of the society. He has had three duplicates made with which they hope to gain admittance to the meeting.

They disguise themselves in native costumes and decide to pass Raikes off as a deaf and dumb nephew of MacKinnon's, because he does not know Chinese. They gain admittance by their counterfeit tokens, but when asked for their names, numbers and to show their brands they are up against it. MacKinnon quickly replies that they are new recruits, from a distant province in the South, and have attended this meeting for the purpose of being branded and assigned their numbers. This answer seems satisfactory, they are masked, as are all the others and allowed to enter the main assembly. Here they swear allegiance and are told to strip to the waist to receive the brand of the society.

Archer and Raikes both go through with it and are branded on the arm. MacKinnon is taken last, he hesitates about disrobing, endeavoring to get by with merely baring his arm. This, however, is not allowed so he strips, disclosing long livid scars across his left shoulder and back. As he is being branded a voice from the rear shouts:

"Hold! He, who stands before you was never Lu-Wei, or any other mandarin in all Yunnan!"

Lu-Wei is the doctor's assumed name—the accusing voice is Tong's.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE IMPOSSIBLE CHINESE

THE president rose from his chair. He was a tall man, very thin and angular; and upon the second finger of his right hand he wore a silver ring in which a great bloodstone reflected the light of the hanging lanterns.

"You have some grounds for this?" he asked.

He spoke in a low voice, very hard and without emotion.

"I know it!" cried Tong. "This man is none other than Ma-ki-yuan, of whom all China knows!"

Ma-ki-yuan, the nearest approach the Chinese could ever get to the pronuncia-

*Part Two*

*A Novel of the Chinese Hatred of Foreign-Devils*

# *The Society of the Silver Shoe*

*By* CHARLES GILSON

tion of MacKinnon, was indeed well known to all Pekin. Alone among foreigners, he was known to understand the complicated rules of native etiquette, Chinese traditions and classic literature. Also, he numbered among his friends so many influential mandarins that he would naturally be regarded as the arch-enemy of such a fierce and fanatical brotherhood as the Society of the Silver Shoe.

Tong's declaration had a starling effect upon the assembly. It was as if every man in that vast, dim chamber took in a deep breath. The sound that stirred the silence was like the hiss of some great, mythical monster—the five-clawed Dragon of the East.

MacKinnon never moved. He stood upright before the president, who had folded his arms.

Tong pointed excitedly at the doctor, and raised his voice almost to a shriek.

"Should I not know well him whom I serve?" he cried. "I have seen those scars too often to be wrong. This is the very man."

There ensued upon the instant something in the nature of a panic. Someone cried out that they had been betrayed by a foreign-devil spy; and there followed the shuffling of many feet, while several benches were knocked down in a general stampede toward the center of the room.

Raikes found himself by the side of Randal Archer.

"We're in a tight place!" he whispered. "What's to be done?"

Though it was clear from his gestures that the president was endeavouring to speak, no word that he said was audible by reason of the uproar and confusion. A crowd of frenzied men swarmed around MacKinnon, handling him roughly, buffeting him first this way and then that.

The doctor was making no attempt to resist. They saw the green mask torn from his face.

Archer dragged Raikes through the crowd toward the wall, where they had liberty to exchange a few quick, whispered words. Masked as they were, and dressed in much the same fashion as many others in the room, they had been overlooked for the time being, in the excitement of the moment.

Raikes fumbled under his long coat for his revolver.

"Open fire on the devils!" he whispered.

"We can account for a round dozen each."

Archer gripped his arm. He had but a moment in which to make up his mind. He knew the country and he understood the Chinese. He saw in a flash that the situation could be partially saved by cool calculation, whereas hot blood would prove their undoing.

"Put up that gun!" said he. "If we fight we've not a dog's chance. Scores of them are armed as well as ourselves. We have a few seconds' grace. They've both forgotten us and lost us. You and I can escape."

"And leave MacKinnon!" exclaimed Raikes.

"Sure," said the other. "How can we save him by throwing away our lives? You may take it from me, they'll never kill him if you and I get safe away."

"Why?"

"Because they dare not. Ma-ki-yuan, as they call him, is a power in the land, the friend of viceroys and prefects."

"I see the idea," said Raikes, opening wide an eye from force of habit, forgetting that he had left his monocle behind him. "We can only help the doctor by getting out of this as quick as we can. But, you're sure of it, Archer? They won't do him in?"

The American shook his head.

"Not even the Silver Shoe is strong enough for that," said he. "But, if you and I are murdered in this very room, there'll be no evidence against them, and they'll put an end to MacKinnon, too."

"By Jove," cried Raikes, "a brain wave, what! Make for the curtains, my son! The two old men won't trouble us and we'll soon settle the fellow with the sword."

The place was pandemonium. The president himself may have remembered that MacKinnon was not alone, but it was in vain that he attempted to make himself heard. Indistinguishable as they were from the others, Raikes and the young American made their way unnoticed to the curtains at the far end of the room.

Groping through the dark lobby, they stumbled into the small ante-chamber where the old registrar was seated at his table with his ink-brush in his hand.

With the drawing of the curtains the sound of the uproar in the great inner room was audible. The old man sprang to his feet; and when the two fugitives rushed past him, he cried out in alarm.

As for the armed janitor, he was brave and defiant enough, until he found himself looking down the barrel of Raikes's Webley, when he not only sprang aside, but actually dropped his sword.

A moment after, the fugitives found themselves in the dark and narrow streets. Archer, who had no time to try to pick up his bearings, hastened at random from one street to another, until at last he found himself in the Street of the Hatamen itself. Hence it was easy to find his way to the Legation Quarter, where in the small hours of the morning both the foreign ministers and commanding officers were made acquainted with what had happened.

THE time for secrecy was past. The discovery of the existence of a powerful anti-foreign secret society, with its headquarters in the capital itself, and the disappearance of the celebrated Doctor MacKinnon—the great Ma-ki-yuan—were problems that could be solved only by the diplomats.

The Chinese Government was approached; whereupon such great officials as Chung-li were apologetic. Professing to be scandalized, they declared that they would do their utmost both to find the doctor and expose the Silver Shoe.

At the same time, they had no intention of doing anything of the sort. Distorted accounts of what was supposed to have happened appeared in all the European and American papers; while the affair remained the one topic of the Legation Quarter for months. Several members of the society were arrested, but no one could be persuaded to give any information. At the failing of the Chinese government to restore MacKinnon the foreign ministers insisted that armed allied troops should search both the Chinese and Tartar Cities.

One might as well have looked for a needle in a haystack. No trace of the doctor could be found; and Randal Archer, who had been given a free hand in the matter, was at last compelled to admit that he had failed.

Dejected and over-tired, he turned up one night in the mess of the Wessex Fusiliers, where he found Sir John Raikes.

"I've done my best, Raikes," said he; "but it's no good. Where MacKinnon is, I don't know; but I still feel convinced

that they have not dared to murder him."

"And in the meantime," said Raikes, "the Chinese Government laughs at us."

"I've done everything I can," said the other. "We've found scores of natives who are undoubtedly members of the Silver Shoe, all of whom have the brand-mark of the society on their arms. But these people will tell us nothing but lies. They explain the brand-mark in various ways: one man says it's a birth-mark that he has had all his life; another doesn't know how it got there; while another swears that he put it there himself! When we ask why this mark should be in the shape of a shoe, the only answer we get is, 'Why not?' Impossible people!"

"MacKinnon himself would know how to deal with them," said Raikes.

"I've thought of that myself," said Archer. "I've had all his personal belongings, even his library, moved into the American Legation. His servants have deserted, and his house would sooner or later have been looted. I've got a definite plan. I don't intend to drop the matter."

"Nor I," said Raikes. "I told old MacKinnon I'd stick to him, and I'll do the same for you."

Archer got to his feet and walked to the window. A full, round China moon was high in the sky, where there was not a cloud to be seen. A warm wind was blowing from the south, which stirred the leaves of the cherry trees around the old Chinese building. Mosquitoes droned about the oil lamp; and far away, beyond the wall of the Forbidden City, could be heard the shrill voice of a Chinese singer who was playing upon a quaint, one-stringed instrument.

"Raikes," said Archer, "I've passed myself off as a Chinese before, and I mean to do it again. I'm going into the city—to live there for days. It may prove to my advantage that I'm branded as a member of the Silver Shoe."

"I'm entitled to three months' leave," said the Englishman. "I'll come with you, if you want me."

Archer shook his head.

"Better not," said he. "You can't speak the language. But, if I want you in the future, I can count upon you?"

"Every time," said Raikes. "You'll find me here when you want me. MacKinnon was a friend of mine."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INN OF THE ALMOND TREE

FOR centuries the main lines of communication throughout China have been the great canals and waterways that link the Yangtse with the rivers to the north and south. Only in quite recent years have railway lines been constructed; and there never have been—and possibly never will be—roads that are suitable for motor traffic.

River transportation is obviously the most economical; as time is seldom of the least importance in the East, a great proportion of the population of China earn their bread upon the waters. Apart from the fishing junks, some of which wander as far as the mid-Pacific, there are millions who are employed as junkmen and towcoolies on the rivers and canals.

The main artery of this vast system of waterways is undoubtedly the Grand Canal that enables the Pekinese to trade upon the Yangtse, and brings the merchant from semi-tropical Yunnan to the north. For this reason, in the narrow streets of Pekin and Tientsin City, strangers are often to be met with, men—as the Northern Chinese themselves express it—of different heart to themselves, who find it difficult both to speak and to understand the dialect of Chihli and Shangtung.

A wayfarer from a remote village, called Ta-hsien, on the Upper Yangtse, sat sipping green tea in an inexpensive restaurant in the Street of the Hatamen, that rejoiced in the flowery title of the "Inn of the Almond Tree." This stranger went by the homely name of Wu; which is about as common a surname in China as Wang or Lu or Ching.

This Wu was ready to declare that he had come north by way of the Grand Canal to Tientsin, where he had sold his merchandise, and thence by the Pei-Ho to Tung-chau, where he had left his junk.

No one would have recognized in his wrinkled, weather-beaten countenance, in his tattered and greasy clothes, the smart young under-secretary of the American Legation, who was reported to have been sent upon a diplomatic mission to Corea.

Archer had now been living in the Tartar City for a week. He had slept in inns where the mattresses were infested with vermin. He had eaten chopped-up meat

with his rice that he knew to be dog's flesh, and strange dishes that might have been anything. Professing himself a stranger in the great city, he had seen the sights of the place, and had discussed a variety of topics with a greater variety of people; merchants, hawkers, government officials and lousy Buddhist priests.

At the present moment, he was content to sit silent and observe. The ground floor of the inn, like that of many Chinese restaurants, had no wall facing the street; and those who sat at the wooden tables could watch the passers-by in the great, busy thoroughfare. And besides, here was a convenient place to listen to snatches of conversation; for the American was confident that he had but to be patient, and careful not to show his hand, to learn something, sooner or later, in connection with the Silver Shoe.

He had been prepared to wait days, even weeks, without meeting with any success; and on that account he was more or less pleasantly surprised when four men entered the restaurant, one of whom he instantly recognized as the fat man who had officiated as master of the ceremonies at the meeting of the society. Though he now saw the man's face for the first time, there was no mistaking either that rotund figure with its amazingly short legs, or the peculiarly high-pitched, squeaky voice that ordered rice cakes and four bowls of *samshu*.

The Yangtse junkman had some difficulty in overhearing what they were talking about; for the newcomers conversed in undertones and people were continually moving about in the room. But he distinctly heard mention more than once of the Silver Shoe, which assured him that he had not been mistaken in his man.

At the same time, there was little in the fat man's countenance to suggest that he had any connection with a formidable secret society with a most sinister objective and the most bloodthirsty aims. For he had a round, jovial face and merry, little eyes; he laughed a great deal about nothing—which may have accounted for his stoutness.

His name proved to be Wen How; for thus he was addressed by his companions, who treated him with marked respect.

Upon a sudden, having decided to take the bull by the horns, the Yangtse junkman got to his feet, crossed to the table where the fat man and his friends were sitting, and introduced himself, by presenting a little silver shoe.

He was asked to join them at their table, to be regaled with *samshu*—a far milder alcoholic drink than *tsiu*. After the usual compliments had been exchanged, Wu upon request gave his name and the reason he had come to Pekin. He volunteered all the information necessary in regard to several quite mythical relations. He compared the miserable part of the country from which he came to the glories of the ancient capital; and then, in true Oriental fashion, he got to business.

Some months before, he had become a member of the Society of the Silver Shoe in the city of Hankow; and while in Pekin, he naturally desired to associate himself with the headquarters of the movement. He had made sundry, furtive inquiries, and had been told to present himself at the Pagoda of the Water Dragon, which place he had found deserted, save for the dust and the cobwebs, and the three images of the Great Ones of the Earth. No doubt the honorable and worthy Wen How would be able to advise one who was no more than a miserable worm, a stranger in their renowned and noble city!

Wen How was plausible. He explained that there had recently been trouble in the foreign-devil quarter, as he described the legations. The government was on their side, though officials could not openly support the society. On that account they had been obliged to change their headquarters: the members of the society now met periodically in secret in a great vault beneath the Lama Temple.

"And how is one to know," asked Wu, "when a meeting is to take place?"

"That is a simple matter," said Wen How. "His Excellency, the president, and myself have arranged all that. Clearly we can not advertise the thing either upon placards or in the newspapers. A meeting will shortly be announced in such a manner that everyone concerned will hear of it, and no one who is not concerned will be given any cause to be suspicious. On the appointed night, green rockets will be fired from the courtyard of the Lama Temple itself, where those who are not members of the society will presume that some festival is in progress."

The Yangtse junkman with extreme politeness thanked Wen How for his information, shook hands with himself, and bowing low, departed—well satisfied with himself and the world at large.

FOR the next five days, Archer continued to live in the Tartar City, taking lodgings near the north wall, by the Lama Temple itself. As day followed day, he became more and more self-confident. But, familiar as he was with the country and the secretive ways of a surprisingly clever people, he should have realized from the first that he was never out of danger. The truth of this was brought home to him late one night, as he was walking homeward along the Street of Sublime Learning, when he was surprised to discover that he was being followed.

More than once he turned into a side street, to come back again into the main thoroughfare. Occasionally he stopped and looked back, to observe that the man who dogged his footsteps had also stopped and was endeavoring to hide.

At this Archer was determined not to return home. He would infinitely prefer to spend the entire night wandering aimlessly about the Tartar City.

This, in fact, was what he did for more than an hour, by the end of which time he found himself upon the open waste-ground to the north of the Imperial City, upon the road that leads from the Drum Tower to the Ti-shing Gate.

He had purposely led the man into a deserted part of the city; for he knew that anything in the nature of a discussion or an argument would immediately attract a crowd. Turning sharp, he walked straight back resolved to have the matter out.

As he drew nearer, the man came to a halt, and appeared to be on the point of retreating when he was accosted in the Pekin dialect.

"Am I your debtor, my friend, that you have followed me for more than an hour?"

"You owe me nothing," said the other, who was a tall, thin man, wearing a long coat and the hat of a White Button mandarin. "You owe me no more than a word of explanation. As from your accent you are no citizen of Pekin, I would know your name and business."

"My name is Wu," said Archer. "I have journeyed hither from Ta-shien, which is near Ichang, on the Sacred River."

"And that is a lie," said the other.

He spoke quite calmly, in the tone of one who is convinced.

Archer knew that no Chinese would take that as an insult. It was more in the nature of a compliment than an affront to be told that he had lied.

"Explain yourself," said he.

"When last I saw you," said the other, "your name was Lu-Fong. And you were a native of these parts, a farmer of Paoting-fu."

Though he had no reply to this, the American had his hand ready on his revolver. He realized that he was confronted with a crisis, that this man—who ever he was—had somehow seen through his disguise and recognized him as one of MacKinnon's two companions on the night when the doctor was captured.

He drew nearer to the man that he might see his face more clearly, for the night was pitch dark. And then he recognised the truth and the full extent of his danger: he was face to face with Tong, MacKinnon's compradore.

However, he kept his head. He showed no surprise. He even laughed, as if the matter were a joke.

"You are right," said he. "I am Lu-Fong, though for the present I call myself Wu. What do you want with me?" he asked.

"I have something to give you," said Tong.

"What?"

*"This!"*

At the word, the man sprang forward, a knife glittering in his hand.

Though the American had been ready for some seconds, he fired a random shot that, as good luck had it, struck the compradore in the wrist of the hand that held his knife.

Stumbling forward, he let out a cry of pain. The bone of his wirst was shattered; his knife fell from his fingers; and a moment after two hands grasped his throat and he was hurled bodily to the ground.

THE struggle that ensued lasted not a minute; for a one-armed man is helpless. In a moment, Tong found himself pinned to the ground upon his back, with the blade of his own knife directed at his heart.

"You get no more than you deserve," said Archer, "if I kill you on the spot."

Far from having any such intention, he now saw that this was the very chance he had waited for for days.

"Why did you attempt to kill me?" he demanded.

The better part of a minute elapsed before the compradore replied.

"Because I know you," said he.

"Who am I, then?"

"Neither Lu Fong nor Wu, but the son of a foreign-devil and a pig, who came with Ma-ki-yuan to the Pagoda of the Water Dragon to spy upon the Silver Shoe."

"Therefore," said Archer, "I have no option but to kill you, here and now, since it was you who betrayed Ma-ki-yuan. But, you are a Manchu, so I have been told; and a Manchu is always open to a bargain. Even now you and I may be able to come to some sort of an arrangement."

"My wrist pains me!" groaned Tong.

"That is your own fault," said Archer. "Tell me, is your life worth nothing to you, or do you no more fear to die than the fool who lies down to sleep on the railway-line to Tientsin, so that the devil-carriage may crush him and his relations receive compensation?"

"I do not fear death," said Tong, "though life is sweet to one as fortunate and as wealthy as myself."

"Then, let no falsehood pass your lips," said the other. "I am not afraid to kill you. Speak the truth, and I may spare your life. You must tell me where Ma-ki-yuan is. That is my first condition."

"If I refuse?" said the man.

"I have told you," said the other.

"And if I lie to you?"

"Remember, I know who you are, and you can always be identified. The Chinese Government will not be able to protect you. To escape from the foreign police, you will be obliged to fly from Pekin; and that, I have some reason to suppose, will not be much to your liking. Now, where is Ma-ki-yuan?"

Tong was slow to answer. For some moments he seemed to be turning the question over in his mind.

"He is held a prisoner," said he at last, "in the Temple of the Seven Stars."

"I have never heard of it," said Archer.

"Beyond the Ming Tombs lies the road to So-li-ping, where the Great Wall turns southward and crosses the Hwang Ho. Upon the left bank of the yellow devil river, where the Great Wall ends, stands the Temple of the Seven Stars upon a mountain top that overlooks the plain of Ho Tau, where there are wild men and wild sheep and horses, and where there is neither shade from the summer sun nor shelter from the winter wind."

"That may be the truth," said the American, "or, perchance, it may be a lie. I make it my business to find out. But I have not yet done with you," he went on. "You must know many members of the society who come from the province of Hupeh?"

"Many," said Tong.

"And has one of these, to your certain knowledge, taken with him to the spirits of his ancestors, the secrets of the Silver Shoe?"

"There was a man of King-chau whose name was Ngan-wen-li, who traveled to the north by way of Kaitong, where he died of the plague," said Tong.

"In regard to this man," said Archer, "I would know but one other thing: his official number as a member of the Silver Shoe?"

Tong clenched his teeth. He did not look at his opponent, but lay staring straight above him at the vague stars in the misty sky.

"You tear the heart from me!" he groaned.

The American laughed.

"This is no time for half measures," said he. "To myself this may mean much, but to you it means more. You have to choose between life and death."

"There is no reason why I should know his number," said Tong.

"But you do," Archer insisted.

"Five thousand and fifty-one."

"And how do you know it?" asked the American, who wanted to be sure of his ground.

"Ngan-wen-li died, as I have said, in Kaifong. As this man was a friend of mine, and he was coming to Pekin on urgent business, he wrote me a letter on his death-bed, asking me to manage his affairs. I naturally reported his death to the registrar of the society, and it was then that I learned his official number."

Archer, who was by no means satisfied with this, gave a grunt of disapproval.

"I must take what comes my way," said he, half to himself, "and trust to luck. But I have another question to ask: who is the Red Button mandarin who is your president?"

At that, Tong, who had hitherto shown no signs of fear, began to tremble in every limb. He made a few guttural, incoherent noises that might have been due to the physical pain that he was suffering, before he found his voice.

"I cannot answer that!" he gasped. "It is impossible!"

Archer waited a moment.

"I am a man of honor," said he. "A secret between ourselves."

"You do not know," said Tong. "He who is your master as well as mine can be terrible. Were I to betray him, he would somehow find it out, and I should be tortured to death; I should die by inches."

Archer could tell by the man's manner that he was now, at any rate, sincere. On that account he had sense enough to accept the situation such as it was.

"Since you will not betray him whom you so greatly fear," said he, "remember always that I give you back your life on the sole condition that you are true to me. I ask for no oath; for that would not bind you, if your own interests were not at stake. However, I have lived long enough in this country to know that a Chinese of birth and education can be true to his word. The White Button you wear is guarantee enough. You are free to go your way."

Tong rose to his feet, holding his shattered wrist. Upon his long cloak there were great stains of blood.

"Indeed," he declared, "there is no need for me to swear by the Three Religions. I am, as you suppose, a man of honor."

Walking slowly, he went his way into the darkness, back to the close-packed houses in the great, stifling city.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE YAMEN

IT OFTEN happens that, when we expect a thing for days, we are surprised when it occurs. Randal Archer —otherwise, the Yangtse junkman, Wu— was seated late one evening in his favorite resort, the Inn of the Almond Tree, where he was now well known to the proprietor, when a great rocket shot high into the sky from the neighborhood of the Lama Temple.

The Chinese were not only the first people in the world to manufacture fireworks, but they are still capable of producing the most gorgeous firework displays on such occasions as public festivals, viceregal receptions and the festivals of the New Year. One rocket after another ascended from the Temple, some breaking up into hundreds of green stars, others to descend in fountains of green spray.

The American knew the Orient well enough to be aware that there was no need for haste. He allowed more than an hour to elapse before he got to his feet and walked northward along the Street of Sublime Learning, until he approached the Lama Temple.

Following a man who appeared to know where he was going, he passed through a smithy where, late though it was, three half naked blacksmiths were at work at their forge, and descended a flight of stone steps into a damp, underground chamber that was illumined by a single candle of enormous size.

Here was Wo Hung, ready with the pale green masks that every member of the society was compelled to wear; and in the same room, too, was the registrar, with his tortoise-shell spectacles and his ink-brush, seated at a table before his rolls of paper.

To the old man Archer declared his number to be five thousand and fifty-one. Whereat the registrar looked up, surprised.

"But this man is dead!" he exclaimed. "His name has been erased."

"If you can still read the characters," said Archer, "you will see that my name is Ngan-wen-li. That I am here and not dead, you may also see, for I have journeyed hither all the way from Kaifong."

"We had the news," said the other, "that you had died in Kaifong of the plague."

"I had the plague, and yet I live," said Ngan-wen-li, who slipped his short coat from his shoulder and displayed the brand of the society.

"It is beyond doubt," he registrar admitted, "that there has been some slight mistake. You are at liberty to enter."

The American found himself in a long, shallow hall, with a low roof and half

buried in deep shadow by reason of the many great stone pillars that supported the temple above. As before, the president was seated upon his high-backed chair; while Wen How, the fat man, strutted here and there, full of his importance.

The proceedings of the evening were tedious and for the most part irrelevant, though there was a great show of hatred for the 'green-eyed barbarians' and the Japanese, and much talk of a golden age when the Chinese would be masters of the world.

As many as twenty new members were enrolled. The meeting broke up, the crowd dispersing in the small hours of the morning to all parts of the city.

Archer—who had gone to the temple with a purpose—had never felt less sure of himself. As Wu, the Yangtse junkman, he had made many friends in the Tartar City; and now, having passed himself as the deceased Ngan-wen-li, he had accepted the responsibility of a dual personality. This, as he saw quite clearly, might lead to complications; though it was at that very moment that he decided to risk an enterprise which was little short of desperate.

He did not seek the adventure; the opportunity was thrown in his way. Without the main gate of the Lama Temple, a mandarin's chair awaited under the cherry trees, the four half-naked coolies squatting on the ground.

There approached, still wearing his pale green mask, the president himself. The coolies sprang to their feet and seized the long bamboo poles that bore the hooded cabinet. The mandarin entered his chair; the curtains were drawn; and he was carried swiftly along the Pekin streets, as the first signs of daybreak were appearing in the east.

Randal Archer made up him mind in a flash. Let the risk be what it might, he would follow the chair, find out that very morning where the mandarin lived, and so learn who the president of the Society of the Silver Shoe really was.

The coolies moved in step at a kind of jog trot, Archer following at a safe distance, being careful not to let them out of his sight. Entering the Imperial City by the northern gate, they moved towards Prospect Hill, singing a kind of chant in deep, guttural voices.

IN THE faint twilight it was possible to distinguish the curved roofs and fantastic gables of the ancient buildings which were for the most part the *yamens,* or official residences, of people of distinction. These mansions are situated, as a rule, in gardens with paved walks, where there are stone vases, pillars and many archways, each *yamen* being surrounded by a high wall through which there is but a single entrance.

The chair was carried through the gateway of one of the larger *yamens.* Archer had no intention of entering—indeed, there was no reason why he should. He had found out all he had wanted. It would be a simple matter to find the place again, and to ask any chance acquaintance the name of the mandarin who lived there.

Unfortunately for him, he was observed to have followed the chair by the gatekeeper, a tall, handsome Chinese with a smooth face and eyebrows as black as coal, who crossed the road, grasped Archer by a shoulder, and rudely demanded his business.

The American recognized at once that there was but one way out of his difficulty. China is a land of beggars, and his clothes were dirty enough in all conscience for him to play the part.

"I have journeyed," said he, "all the way from the village of Ta-hsien upon the Yangtse. I am a stranger in this city, and I have had no food for many hours."

"If you desire no more than food," said the man, "you can receive it. We have a guest-house here, where rice is distributed daily to the poor. Follow me."

Archer was in half a mind to turn and run for it, was only prevented from doing so by the fact that the man would probably give chase.

He therefore accompanied the keeper, who was armed with a sword, into a kind of barn, a wooden building just inside the gate, where the man lit a lantern and then went out again into the garden, saying that he would return in a moment.

The American's heart went into his mouth, when he heard the heavy iron gates of the *yamen* close with a crash. He felt like a terrified mouse that finds itself caught in a trap.

Presently, the tall man returned, carrying in one hand a large bunch of keys. There was no question that, for some rea-

son or other, he had locked the gate. It was possible that he was already suspicious.

"You desire rice?" said he. "You are at liberty to eat your fill."

He took from a shelf a china bowl half filled with rice, and threw upon the table a pair of ivory chop-sticks.

"There is rice, and here are chop-sticks," he announced, with undisguised contempt; "but, no doubt, you eat with your fingers."

Archer gave immediate proof that this was so. Pretending to be famished and knowing that his clumsy use of the chop-sticks might betray him, he scooped the rice in handfuls into his widely opened mouth.

When he had eaten, he got to his feet.

"I would know the name of your master," said he, "that I may fire crackers in his honor and curse the evil spirits that surround him, when he passes through the streets where green-eyed foreign-devils have gone before him?"

Without a word of warning, the janitor seized him by the throat.

"You are here for no lawful purpose," he cried, "for no man comes begging at this hour of the morning."

It was an occasion on which argument could achieve no purpose. Any attempt at explanation, too, might prove no more than waste of breath. If it came to a struggle, the firing of a single shot within those walls would bring a veritable hornet's nest about his ears. The American, clenching a fist, drove it with all his force into the very pit of the tall man's stomach.

Winded though the man was and almost doubled in half, he did not cry out. He had strength enough to stumble through the doorway into the garden and there to draw his sword.

The sight of the gleaming barrel of a revolver in the half-light of morning caused him to change his mind, to realize that discretion was the better part of valor. He now had breath enough to take to his heels, shouting like a maniac for help.

The American gave chase at once, believing that he could never escape from the *yamen,* unless he gained possession of the keys. But the chair-coolies were still before the entrance of the main building and came running to their fellow servant's aid.

Archer had some reason to think that he was lost. He saw at a glance the folly of resistance. Though the gate was closed against him, he must attempt to find some other way of escape.

Under cover of various scattered outbuildings, he endeavored to make the circuit of the outer wall, and had not gone far before he came upon a great heap of débris beside some stables, where he scrambled to the roof.

Though the roof all but gave way beneath his weight, he succeeded in springing high enough to grasp the top of the wall; and hoisting himself up, he looked down into a narrow street below.

By then it was not only almost daylight, but the alarm had spread throughout the whole *yamen* and a party of armed men had issued from the gate. The street below was a *cul de sac,* ending at the *yamen* wall itself. The fugitive saw at a glance that those who had passed through the gate must reach the end of this street long before he could, as he had first to climb down the wall.

This was a matter of great difficulty and no little danger, though there was a buttress there and many of the bricks were missing, affording convenient pigeonholes for feet and hands. The American was not half way down when he fell, bruising himself badly on the hard ground below, though he escaped with no broken bones.

He set off running down the street, still hoping to escape. Suddenly his pursuers in a body appeared in front of him. Desperate, he threw his weight against the door of a house to his right, broke it open, and found himself in darkness.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHUNG-LI

IT WAS so dark, indeed, that he could not have seen his hand before his face. The atmosphere of the house was hot and stifling, and reeked of the mingled odors of opium and garlic.

For a few seconds, Archer stood quite still, listening. He could hear the shouts of savage men in the street without. Thrusting a hand into the pocket of his short Chinese coat, he took out a box of matches and struck a light.

He saw an open doorway to his left. The lighted match still burning in his hand, he entered a small room, where three or four men devoid of clothing lay sound asleep

from the effects of opium upon couches that were covered with straw matting. He could still hear his pursuers in the street. Apparently, they had not yet discovered which house the fugitive had entered.

He struck another match, the flickering light of which disclosed a narrow staircase immediately before him. He had already made up his mind. If any way of escape lay open to him, it could be only by way of the roof.

Three steps at a time, he dashed up the stairs. Three stories he passed and then the staircase ceased.

He had hoped to find some skylight or trap-door by way of which he could gain the roof; when he could see nothing of the kind, his heart for the moment sank within him.

Clearly he could not return down the stairs. That would be to court certain death, or a fate even worse. There was but one doorway on the landing; and hoping that beyond he might find some egress to the roof, he entered bodly, his revolver ready in his hand.

He found himself standing in the full light of an oil lamp, not an arm's length from a tall Chinese whom he recognized at once as Tong, MacKinnon's compradore, who carried his right arm in a sling.

For a moment, the American hoped that he would not be recognized, but the man's first words dispelled all doubt upon the point, though his face remained expressionless.

"How did you find me here?" he asked.

Archer was no less surprised than the other.

"Your destiny and mine, my friend," said he, "are interwoven so it seems."

"What do you want with me?" asked Tong.

"No more than to tell you," said Archer, "that you're a dead man if you resist."

They could hear the noise in the street. It must have been at that moment that the broken door was discovered, for a loud shout was audible in the lower part of the house—a shout that must have awakened the opium-smokers from their dreams.

Archer grasped the man by a shoulder and looked him straight in the face.

"I have nothing to fear from you," said he, "with that broken wrist of yours. I intend to go out of that window and on to the roof. But I'm thinking, your life will not be worth a minute's purchase, if I'm caught with you, and it's found that my pigtail is false and I'm a foreigner in disguise."

Tong passed a hand across his forehead, as if to wipe away a cold perspiration. They could hear footsteps ascending the stairs.

"It will be much the same if you escape," said he, in a calm voice. "I am no free agent, but the tool of the gods. I must help those I hate. Take off the sling and bandage from my arm."

Though the American had no idea of the man's intentions, he could see that Tong was not only sincere, but had some definite plan at the back of his mind that might prove to their mutual advantage. In a moment the man's right arm hung helpless at his side. Archer could see the shattered wrist, with the wound but half healed, through which had passed the bullet he himself had fired.

"Open the window," whispered the compradore. "You can escape along the roof. At the end of the buildings there is a waterpipe down which you should be able to climb. But, as I succor you, you must grant me some protection. Before you go, fire your revolver. When they come, I will swear that I resisted you. See here," he cried, "I give them proof! Better torture myself than suffer such tortures as Chung-li can devise."

"Chung-li!" cried Archer. "That was his *yamen!* I should have known it!"

"Yes," said the Chinese. "Were it ever known that it was I who betrayed to you the whereabouts of Ma-ki-yuan, the revenge of the Silver Shoe would descend upon me like a thunderbolt."

And as he spoke, he did a thing that was at once brave and cowardly. Raising his wounded arm, he struck it with all his force against the table, so that the wound opened afresh.

Uttering a cry of pain, he snatched up the lamp and dashed it to the ground, where the glass broke into fragments and the light went out.

"Fire!" he cried. "And then, begone!"

His face was all screwed with pain.

The American, directing his revolver to the floor, fired into the boarding; and a moment after, he was out of the window, and scrambling on all fours upon a red tiled roof.

These tiles in places gave way beneath his weight and went clattering down into the narrow street below. The houses were not only dilapidated and in ill repair, but some were three stories high and others two; with the result that Archer sometimes found it necessary to climb to a higher roof, or to drop ten feet or more to one that was lower.

At the end of the street, without difficulty, he found the water-pipe that Tong had mentioned; and down this he slid with more haste than discretion, chafing the skin from his hands, though he arrived on the ground without mishap.

Immediately he set off running, and was soon lost in the narrow streets to the west of the Forbidden City, whence he found his way to the Chien-men and then to the legations.

HE HAD at first some difficulty in passing the sentry of the British Legation Guard; but, having satisfied the sergeant as to his identity, he finally gained admittance into the mess, dressed as a Chinese though he was, and with the dirty clothes that he was wearing almost in rags.

He found Captain Sir John Raikes at breakfast, in khaki drill and his eyeglass in his eye.

"I've got out of the business by the skin of my teeth," said he; "and I've come to you, Raikes, as we're colleagues in a way, and sworn to help the doctor."

"Is MacKinnon alive?" asked Raikes.

"Yes, a prisoner in some heathen temple at the very end of the world."

Sir John Raikes directed his knife at the carcass of a bird.

"Have some cold pheasant?" said he. "You look as if you might be hungry."

Archer's mouth watered at the very sight of Christian food. However, he had not altogether forgotten the niceties of civilization.

"I must have a wash first," he suggested; "and after that, a change of clothes, if you'll lend me some. Then I'll tell you all my news, and there's plenty for you to hear. I must report the whole affair at my own legation; and you may take it from me, before this evening, some decisive step will be taken. The man, if you please, who runs the Silver Shoe is none other than Chung-li, one of the most influential men in the whole country!"

Raikes exchanged his eyeglass from one eye to the other.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "Why only yesterday afternoon he paid us an official call, with a jolly old visiting-card as big as a poster. He stayed for over an hour, and talked English tolerably well."

Archer, as soon as he had changed his clothes and had breakfast, crossed to the American Legation, where he had a long interview with his chief, the minister. Early in the afternoon, the ministers of six of the great foreign powers conferred together, with the result that, later in the day, certain secret orders were issued to the commanding officers of the American and British troops.

Upon receiving Archer's report, the ministers decided not to refer the matter to the *Tsung-li-yamen*, the Chinese Foreign Office, in which Chung-li himself was one of the most prominent officials. Though such a course would have been diplomatic, it would not have been wise, since Chung-li would certainly be warned and make good his escape.

None the less, there was little chance of international complications that might end in war. They had evidence enough already against the president of the Silver Shoe; and there was little doubt that once Chung-li's guilt was established, the government would wash their hands of all responsibility in the matter. It was an occasion, on that account, when it was the soundest policy to strike first and ask for an explanation afterward.

At the same time, it was resolved to treat the whole question as a personal affair. The Chinese might have cause for complaint, if armed troops marched from the legations into the city, when no state of war existed. It was a case really for the police, if there had been police enough in the capital to undertake such a dangerous task. In plain words, it was not an expedition, but a raid.

Archer was placed in charge of the party, with Sir John Raikes as second in command. They were to take with them volunteers from both the American and British Legation Guards, who were instructed that they were acting on their own responsibility and were strictly forbidden to wear uniforms. These men were to be sent in rickshaws in twos and threes, to

the northern part of the city, where they were to rendezvous near the Drum Tower, there they would receive further orders.

Raikes, when he called for Archer at the American Legation, appeared highly amused.

"I've always told you," he declared, "these are the most amazing chappies in the universe. Chung-li, when he paid us his official call, expressed the most kindly feelings toward all Europeans and cursed the Silver Shoe. He said that he had no doubt that such a society existed; but he assured us that for a long time he had been doing his level best to discover who were the ringleaders of the movement. What do you make of that?"

"I found out a good deal about him," said Archer, "long before I knew his name. He's something more than merely cunning. He's a man without pity, who rules the whole society with a rod of iron. His very word is law. But, Raikes," he added, "if you and I do our job tonight, we'll have the rascal under lock and key by morning."

## CHAPTER X

### THE CUP AND THE LIP

ARCHER had already made his plans. His primary object was to kidnap Chung-li, the mandarin, that he might be kept a prisoner under lock and key in the legations, until Doctor MacKinnon was rescued.

So far as the relief expedition was concerned to the far-distant Mongolian frontier, the utmost secrecy was necessary from the first. The Chinese could be revengeful; if it should become known that an attempt was to be made to rescue their prisoner, it was more than probable that he would be murdered, or even tortured, out of spite.

On the other hand, if Chung-li was arrested and detained, little harm was likely to befall MacKinnon. The members of the secret society would no doubt attempt to strike a bargain, offering to exchange one prisoner for the other. They might even insist that no reprisals should be taken, provided they guaranteed that Doctor MacKinnon should suffer no bodily harm.

Archer had already discussed all this with his chief. He intended first to seize his hostage, knowing full well that the news would spread like wild fire from one end of Pekin to the other. Such a drastic step would give the members of the society some cause for sober reflection. MacKinnon must then be rescued swiftly and secretly; and as soon as he was out of danger, the foreign ministers would be in a position to dictate terms to the Chinese Government.

At the same time, Archer realized that he could never hope to succeed, unless he obtained, either by bribery or coercion, the assistance of one who was familiar with the organization of the society and who knew the way to the Temple of the Seven Stars on the Mongolian frontier.

With this object in view, he had already thought of Tong; and therefore, that evening, when he and Raikes left the legations, they chartered rickshaws at the Hatamen Gate and drove straight to the *yamen* in the Imperial City, instead of the Drum Tower near at hand, where they had agreed to meet their men.

The American had no difficulty in finding the house into which he had broken on the morning of his escape, for no attempt had been made to repair the door that had been wrenched from its hinges.

He and Sir John Raikes entered boldly, both dressed in riding-breeches and gaiters, and each carrying a loaded revolver in his hand. As it was then nearly midnight, the opium room on the ground floor was crowded. A man came out into the passage, stared at them in amazement, and then, crying out "Yang-kweitze," foreign-devils, slammed the door in their faces.

"We'll have no trouble with them," said Archer who, flashing a powerful electric torch, led the way up the stairs.

Raikes followed him to the top floor where, without knocking they entered Tong's room. Archer had known that it was a toss-up whether or not they would find the man they wanted. So far as the raid upon the *yamen* was concerned, Tong's assistance was not essential, though his services might be useful. As it happened, the compradore was in no condition to be absent; for he lay upon his mattress in a burning fever, brought about by his self-inflicted wound.

Tong recognized his visitors the moment they entered—for he knew them both well by sight—and made a half-hearted at-

tempt to rise. Weakness and illness had robbed him of something of his Manchu dignity and courage; for he was unable to look Archer in the face. He spoke in Mandarin Chinese.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"To show you, if we can," said Archer, "the error of your ways. Also, my friend, I am not devoid of gratitude."

A sickly smile spread itself upon the compradore's thin lips.

"I have done nothing to help you of my own free will," said he. "Have you forgotten that I tried to kill you?"

"You are honest, at any rate," said the American. "By plain speaking only can we come to business."

"Business!" cried Tong, in scorn. "To all intents and purposes, I am your prisoner. You are armed, and I am helpless. Do what you like with me, but realize that, were you the prisoners of the Silver Shoe, you would receive but little mercy."

"I will be as frank with you," Archer replied. "If this night's work proves successful, there will be an end to the Silver Shoe for some years to come."

Tong looked up quickly.

"Is Chung-li arrested?" he asked.

"Not yet. But before morning he will be a prisoner in our hands. The government, which is in no position to go to war with the whole world, will know how to deal with him."

The compradore shrugged his shoulders.

"Chung-li is more powerful than the government," said he. "They would not dare order him to drink poison. He is too great a mandarin to be executed; besides, not a thousand silver taels could purchase the man. No one would have the pluck to do the work."

"But that does not apply to you," said Archer, quietly. "You betrayed Ma-ki-yuan upon whom you spied for months. You attempted to murder me. The Tsung-li-yamen will not think it worth their while to protect a compradore, even though he be a White Button mandarin and a Manchu. However, my friend, I have spoken of gratitude; and I have not forgotten that I am indebted, to some extent, to you. If you have not been a free agent in the past, you are now at liberty to choose which course you take: hold to the Silver Shoe and abide by the result—or throw in your lot with us."

THE man sat bolt upright with his arms folded across his knees. He was thinner than ever, and his black eyes shone like beads. The only window in the room was a little open; and the light of the lamp had attracted numberless moths, gnats and mosquitoes, many of which were now stuck to the oil.

"You intend to take Chung-li tonight?" he asked.

Archer nodded.

"Then you receive my answer," said Tong, "tomorrow morning."

"We are not such fools as that," laughed the American. "I know well enough that, if we fail, we will never find you here; Pekin is a large place. But, even if Chung-li escapes through our fingers, he is henceforward powerless, and the Silver Shoe is a thing of the past."

"Then why lay hands upon Chung-li himself?" asked Tong. "He is a dangerous man."

"Because we intend to have a hostage," replied Archer, "a hostage for Ma-ki-yaun. I am frank with you because, which ever way you choose, we are never likely to let you out of our sight."

"Free agent as I am," said Tong, with an attempt at irony, "I have heard more threats than promises. What becomes of me, if I agree to serve you?"

"You receive a free pardon and you will be able to continue your work as a compradore. I can guarantee also that, until the Silver Shoe is definitely abolished, you will be given adequate protection. And now, it is for you to decide. We can waste no further time."

"I agree," said the man. "I will throw in my lot with you. But I must be paid."

"That is natural enough," said Archer. "I did not expect a compradore to do anything for nothing. That can be arranged without difficulty; we have ample funds at our disposal."

At that Tong was a changed man. He leaned forward eagerly.

"I can help you considerably," said he, "and I will."

"You will undertake to guide us to the Temple of the Seven Stars?"

"I know the road," said the other. "But, if you go there, go as conquerors, and not as captives. For the captive who there worships, prays devoutly, if his prayers be brief. For he breathes as a man who

drowns slowly. He prays in the Silver Shoe."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Archer.

"I tell no man," said Tong. "That is not part of my bargain. Enough, if I show you the road, and help you to find a key which opens the inner gate of the temple. That you can obtain only in Chung-li's *yamen,* which is not a stone's throw from here."

"The mandarin still trusts you?" the American asked.

"Why should he not?" said the other. "I am a privileged member of the society. That is why I was ordered to hire a room near the *yamen* that I might be at the president's beck and call."

"I have offered you protection," said Archer; "and for that reason, we will not take you with us to the *yamen* itself, where you might be recognized. We will find Chung-li there?"

"Undoubtedly," said Tong. "He consults tonight with Wen How."

"We must also know something of the interior of the house, so that we can go straight to the Tatotai's room."

"That is easy to explain," said Tong. "At the entrance there is the wall that has been built to keep out the devils. Beyond this is a corridor from which run passages both to the right and to the left. These passages join on the other side of the building; but the mandarin's rooms are to be found upon the left side of the right hand passage, and can be distinguished by their doors which are painted red. Here are his private apartments where he sleeps, dines and receives his guests."

"That is all we wish to know," said Archer. "And now, you must come with us. You will receive proper medical attention tomorrow."

The rickety stairs creaked beneath their weight as they descended and the noise brought the opium smokers from the room on the ground floor. But whether or not they knew aught of the Silver Shoe, they had too much respect for loaded firearms to interfere, though they cursed the foreign-devils under their breath.

Archer and his two companions came forth into the moonlight upon the open ground to the north of the Forbidden City. Immediately in front of them was the famous Drum Tower, and a little way to the left, its walls half hidden behind cherry and almond trees, was the *yamen* of Chung-li.

There was not a living soul about. Near at hand was an old graveyard and the ruins of a Taoist joss-house; while, here and there, overgrown by weeds and moss, were many great stones that had once formed part of an ancient building, long since fallen to the ground.

The American led the way toward the Drum Tower which they could see quite plainly standing forth against the starlight. This mediæval Mongol keep contains a great barrel drum that in former days used to strike the hours, which are measured by burning sandal-sticks. By means of a bribe, though with the greatest difficulty, Archer had obtained a key from the attendant priest. On account of its close proximity to the *yamen* of the Taotai, he had selected the place as being a convenient hiding-place for his men.

When he arrived at the tower, he discovered that all his volunteers were present. Two of these men he now detailed to take charge of Tong who was to remain in the tower itself. He was by no means sure whether he could trust the compradore; and it would be time enough to take him to the *yamen* after Chung-li had been captured.

THE rest of the party, led by Archer and Raikes, approached the *yamen,* entering the outer gate by a simple ruse. The American throwing a long Chinese coat over his shoulders, went first, announcing to the gate-keeper that he must see the Taotai on important business. Upon the gate being opened, the keeper was overpowered by three men who sprang upon him from the shadow under the wall. He was then gagged and bound, and thrown into the little guest-house inside the gate.

The rest was easy. Leaving three men to guard the gate, the remainder of the party advanced toward the entrance of the central building. Here was the usual brick wall that is regarded by the Chinese as an efficient barrier to keep out the devil, who always walks in a straight line. Beyond this, they found the door open, with no one to resist them but a fat servant who endeavored to fly at their approach. Too terrified to think of giving the alarm, he

was tripped up and gagged, and left upon the threshold with his hands bound behind his back and his feet tied together.

Both to the right and left, as Tong had told them, were passages dimly illumined by hanging lanterns at long intervals. Knowing that these two passages were joined by a transverse corridor at the far end of the building, Archer divided his men into two parties, giving the command of that which took the left-hand passage to Raikes.

On the presumption that there was more than one exit from the building, and resolved that the mandarin should not escape, Raikes stationed two men at the main entrance, while he himself with the others hastened to the far end of the passage to the corner where it joined the corridor.

He had just reached this corner when he heard a revolver shot on the other side of the building—a shot that was followed by a loud shout which, though but faintly audible beyond the massive stone walls, he recognized as being the voice of his friend, the American.

Fearing that Archer may have failed, he promptly ordered four of his men to go ahead along the corridor, to make sure that there was no way out of the building in that direction. He posted two other men at the corner, with orders to arrest any Chinese who endeavored to pass, while he himself, with the three men who remained, made his way back toward the main entrance.

He had not gone twenty yards before a door upon his left was violently flung open; and a fat man in a silken robe tumbled into the passage.

He was an individual with a figure as comical as it was unprepossessing; for his legs were extraordinarily short and out of all proportion to his body. Though Raikes had only seen the man once before, and then when he was wearing a mask, he at once recognized Wen How, Chung-li's right hand man, whom they knew to be present in the *yamen.*

Sir John Raikes, who was himself leading, made a kind of dive at his victim. They had all strict injunctions not to shoot except in self-defence; and his intention was to seize the fat man by the throat and hand him over to the tender mercies of the escort.

The Englishman's eyeglass was still in his eye; for he had no intention of taking the matter seriously. But as he was about to lay hands upon Wen How, a knife flashed past his face and deeply gnashed his shoulder, while the body of a heavy man struck him so violently that he was hurled against the opposite wall.

With the blood streaming from his wound and his monocle still in his eye, he recovered both his balance and his presence of mind in an instant.

"After him!" he cried. "That's the very man we want!"

A glance had been enough at the gaunt, colossal figure that had issued from the same door as Wen How. It was none other than the mandarin himself, who wore a blue summer robe with gold embroidery and the button of his rank. But, apart from that, the man was unmistakable. Well over six feet in height, and lean as a wolf, he had a huge frame, with brown hands that were like claws, while upon one of his fingers was a silver ring in which was set a bloodstone.

Raikes had every reason to believe that the mandarin was as good as captured, for with long strides Chung-li raced down the passage where every corner was guarded. It looked as if there was no need to fire—which would have been the policy of fools. With all the evidence they had against the Taotai, it was one thing to arrest him, it would be another to murder him in his own *yamen;* for such an action would not only put them in the wrong, but do much to revive a fierce hatred of all foreigners.

Wounded as he was, Raikes, followed by his three men, ran forward in pursuit; and it was natural enough that for the moment Wen How should have been overlooked.

The fat man, remarkably quick in his movements in spite of his stoutness, disappeared into a room on the opposite side of the passage, whence—it was discovered afterward—he escaped by way of a window and a postern gate in the outer *yamen* walls.

Upon a sudden, hastening in pursuit, Raikes heard Archer's voice behind him.

"You can't get out!" he shouted to Chung-li in Mandarin Chinese. "All the passages and doors are guarded, as well as the main gateway, and you had best surrender."

For answer, the mandarin wrenched one of the hanging lanterns from the ceiling and dashed it to the floor, so that the light went out, and they were in semi-darkness; for the next lantern was far away.

Archer drew level with Raikes.

"The torch!" he cried, "I give it you in the opium-house!"

"It's in my pocket," said Raikes. "But I can't use my arm. The fellow sprang at me like a wild cat, and all but did me in. I'm bleeding like a pig."

"We'll see to that in a minute," said the other. "If we're not quick about it, this devil will escape!"

He was not far wide of the mark, though at the time it seemed impossible; for Chung-li fled toward the main entrance where two men had been left on guard. At the lower end of the passage there were no doors on either side; and it seemed certain that presently he must be caught between two fires and compelled to capitulate or turn and fight.

However, by the time Archer had got hold of the electric-torch and flashed on the light, there was no sign of the mandarin to be seen. He had vanished as suddenly and as mysteriously as if he had been spirited away.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE DRUM TOWER

VALUABLE time elapsed before they were able to discover in what manner this seeming miracle had been performed; for they had searched on both sides of the passage before they discovered that one of the square paving-stones was loose and that this was supplied with a small iron ring, by means of which it could be lifted upon hinges.

The discovery was not calculated to give much satisfaction to Randal Archer, who saw himself obliged to admit the failure of his own plan to the United States Minister, since the trap-door opened upon a subterranean passage that led, without doubt, through the outer *yamen* wall. For the time being, however, he had enough to do to look after Raikes, who was not only weak from loss of blood, but suffering considerable pain.

A brief examination proved that no artery had been severed; while the pain was alleviated to some extent by the arm being placed in a temporary sling.

While Archer was thus employed, he related in a few words how the adventure had miscarried. They had raided the *yamen* with such suddenness that he had had every reason to be sanguine of success. Moreover, all the information Tong had given him had been proved to be correct. Half-way down the right-hand passage, they had found the red doors of the mandarin's private apartments; and bursting into one of these, with their loaded revolvers in their hands, they had thought to take Chung-li by surprise and hold him upon the spot.

They were unfortunate inasmuch as the first room they entered proved to be a sleeping-apartment, where there were silk cushioned divans and blackwood tables upon which were opium bowls and pipes. Here a door led into another chamber in which they found the mandarin closeted with Wen How, the fat man, both of whom had had by then some warning of their approach.

For they were not only on their feet, but Chung-li had snatched up a knife with a curved blade and a carved jade handle, before the intruders entered. At once, Wen How leading, they disappeared through a doorway into an inner room; and Archer, attempting to follow them, found the door beyond locked and bolted against him.

It was now obvious that this door was at the entrance of a narrow passage that communicated with the other side of the house, by means of which the two Chinese were enabled to gain the passage patrolled by Raikes and his men.

Either Chung-li had not had time to tell Wen How of the existence of the trap-door, or he may have trusted the agility of the fat man so little that he decided to make good his own escape and let his companion look after himself. At any rate, both were now out the *yamen*. A party detailed to search the out-buildings and the garden failed to find either; whereupon Archer, compelled to admit that he had been outwitted, had no option but to return to the Drum Tower.

There he found that the disaster was even more complete than he had at first imagined; for one of the men whom he

had left in charge of Tong lay wounded, insensible, but still living, with a knife with a handle of carved jade driven deep into his chest.

As for Tong, he, too, lay upon the ground, half strangled, black in the face and speechless.

The other man alone was able to give some account of what had happened. In compliance with their instructions, though all the time keeping a sharp eye upon their prisoner, the two men had seated themselves upon the ground, lit a lantern they had brought with them, and produced a pack of cards.

One was an Englishman, the other was an American; and the game stood in the favor of the former to the extent of one dollar fifty, when suddenly an apparition appeared before them, out of the very ground, the floor of that gloomy chamber that contained naught but a monster drum.

Without warning, a trap-door, the existence of which they had never suspected, was thrown back not six feet away from them. They were given no chance of defending themselves; they had scarcely time to realize what had happened, when a tall Chinese with the ferocity of a savage beast hurled himself upon the Englishman and drove his knife home with such terrific force that the weapon was so tightly wedged between the upper ribs that he could not extricate it.

The American declared that in the lantern-light the face of the man was like that of a fiend. He had huge, angular features and black eyes like those of a reptile that glittered with fury, his mouth was hideously contorted by passion.

The moment he set eyes upon the unfortunate Tong, he came out with a string of oaths in his own language, and flung himself upon the compradore. Tong himself was a strong and active man; but he would have been a mere babe-in-arms in the hands of his huge adversary, even had he not been suffering from an injured wrist.

As it was, he was seized by the throat and all but strangled, the mandarin finding time to kick over the lantern, plunging the place in utter darkness.

For that reason, and since the two struggling combatants were close locked in one another's arms, the American dared not fire, for fear of hitting Tong whom he had received orders to protect as well as guard.

Groping in the dark, he did his best to help the compradore, and received for his pains a blow in the face that he was ready to swear would have felled an ox. He was sent stunned to the ground; and when he recovered his senses, it was to discover that their assailant had escaped.

It took him some time to find the lantern and to light it. He had examined both his companions, and believed the Englishman to be dying. Anyhow, he could do nothing for him, and had decided to hasten to the *yamen* and report what had happened, when Archer and Sir John Raikes and the rest of the party arrived.

FOR the first time, they had had a practical demonstration of the physical strength of their formidable adversary. Chung-li, a high government official, had always kept much to himself, resolutely refusing to have any dealings with Europeans. He was known, however, to be an exceptionally capable man, violent in his prejudices, crafty and ambitious.

Archer realized in a flash that, so far as the safety of Doctor MacKinnon was concerned, the situation, with the escape of the mandarin, had become terribly serious.

As for Tong, the man was terrified, and seemed in some doubt as to whether he ought to be more repentant for having joined the Silver Shoe or for having turned traitor. With an Oriental belief in fatalism, he was convinced that his days were numbered. The very sight of him that night in the Drum Tower, in company of two foreign barbarians, had been enough to convict him in the eyes of Chung-li.

But, for the present, Randal Archer had his hands full, without troubling about the future. One of his men had been dangerously wounded, and needed urgent medical attention; whereas Sir John Raikes, though he made light of his hurt, was in no fit state to walk all the way to the legations.

At the end of the Street of the Hatamen, they found a man with a Pekin cart, a farmer with a load of millet from the country. This cart they hired for a few cents, and converting it into an ambulance wagon, Archer sent it back in charge of a few men.

Tong loudly protested when he was told that he must return with the others to the *yamen.*

"But what if Chung-li finds us!" he exclaimed. "His fury will be like that of a typhoon!"

"We must take the risk of that," said the American. "As likely as not, he's at the other end of the city by now. Both you and I, my friend, have someone else to think of, besides ourselves."

"Who?" asked the compradore.

"Ma-ki-yuan," said Archer. "Chung-li will think of nothing but revenge. What fate lies in store for Doctor MacKinnon in the Temple of the Seven Stars? Answer me that."

Tong shuddered.

"The Silver Shoe," he whispered.

Archer laid a hand upon one of the man's shoulders.

"Tell me what that is?" he asked. "I have heard talk of it before; and I would put an end to all this show of secrecy."

"My master," said Tong, "we have a legend that he who speaks of it is fated to breathe his last in the iron grasp of the Silver Shoe. I will deal honestly with you now, for I am certainly a lost man without the protection of those against whom I have plotted. But do not ask too much of me! Dread of the future lies upon me with the weight of the tomb."

Archer saw that the man's nerves were shattered.

"Take courage," said he. "We'll win yet. And you are safer than you think, since Chung-li will be compelled to fly from the city. Think only of him who was once your master. It is my duty to save his life, and yours to help me. You have told me that the mandarin was in possession of some key of an inner gate in the Temple of the Seven Stars. That key is now somewhere within the yamen; for Chung-li fled in haste. Do you know where to find it?"

Tong found refuge in prevarication.

"There are many duplicates," said he. "If we set about it, we should be able to find another."

"That is no answer to my question," Archer persisted. "I take it, this temple is in some way connected with the Society of the Silver Shoe?"

"The brotherhood originated there," said Tong. "Chung-li started the movement; but, though the lamas be Mongolians by birth, thieves by trade and paupers by necessity, they obey Chung-li only because they fear him."

"Come," said Archer, taking the compradore by an arm; "we waste time with words. The sooner we find this key and get away again, the better for us all."

He led the way back to the *yamen,* followed by his men. They found the outer gates still open, though the gatekeeper had been set at liberty by the mandarin's servants and retainers who, panic-stricken, rushed hither and thither in the greatest state of alarm.

These people, however, scattered in all directions at the approach of Archer's party. As before, men were left on guard at both the main door and the outer gates; while the American himself with Tong and an armed escort proceeded to the mandarin's rooms.

Here Tong searched in feverish haste. As he opened drawers and boxes, his hands were seen to be trembling. He was familiar with the interior of the *yamen,* having at one time been in the employment of the mandarin, also he had since had many private interviews with Chung-li in connection with the affairs of the society.

For all that, it took him some time to lay hands upon a certain ivory box in which he found a bronze key of ancient design, stamped with certain fantastic inscriptions in the old Manchurian language —characters that are for the most part rectangular in shape, bearing some slight resemblance to the cuneiform of Babylonia and Persia.

WITH that in their possession, they lost no time in returning to the legations by way of the western wall of the Imperial City. It was broad daylight when they reached the Chienmen, where Archer dismissed his party.

A medical officer had been got out of bed in the small hours of the morning, and the wounded man was reported to be progressing favorably, though not out of danger. Raikes, with his arm properly bandaged, accompanied Archer to the American Legation, where the minister listened to their story.

He declared that he could take no official steps in the matter. The raid might have been justified, if it had proved suc-

cessful. And its failure had achieved something: Chung-li would undoubtedly fly from the city, and would no longer influence the Tsung-li-yamen; whereas the Society of the Silver Shoe had already burst like a bubble.

On the other hand, one could not shut one's eyes to the fact that MacKinnon was in the gravest danger. For motives of revenge, he might be murdered as soon as the news could be carried to the Temple on the Mongolian frontier.

None the less, and although MacKinnon was admired throughout the length and breath of China, the foreign powers could do nothing, beyond demanding of the Chinese Government the restoration of the prisoner.

And such a demand, whether it came in the nature of a polite request or a peremptory order, was so much waste of breath; since the government was powerless. The affair had now resolved itself into a personal matter between Chung-li and Doctor MacKinnon. It was up to Doctor MacKinnon's friends to save him, if they could. The minister would see that every facility was given them in the way of supplying them with equipment and granting every member of the expedition the necessary leave of absence.

Randal Archer, assisted by Sir John Raikes, made the necessary arrangements that very day. The latter, in spite of his damaged arm, was determined to accompany his American friend; and indeed, his wound afforded him with an excellent excuse for applying for three months' leave.

"Do you remember," said he, "that MacKinnon himself said that I'd be in front of the footlights before the play was finished? But the old boy never dreamed that he'd have the stage to himself!"

"There's little time to lose," said Archer, who was plainly anxious. "News travels extraordinarily quickly in this country. No one knows how. The Chinese in villages five hundred miles inland know what has happened in the treaty ports in a few hours. That is one of the many mysteries of China that no white man has ever been able to explain. You understand, Raikes, we must travel disguised. We are going to a part of the country where no white man has ever been before; and if we don't pass ourselves off as Chinese, the news of our approach will be days in front of us."

"I'm under your orders, as before," said the Englishman. "We have all MacKinnon's wardrobe to choose from, as well as his false pigtails and dyes. It's a bloodthirsty comic opera. A melo-burlesque, my lad."

"I have studied the route already," Archer went on, "and taken Tong's advice. Mule transport over the mountain range to the north of Shansi and thence up the Hwang Ho."

"And trust to the jolly old god of luck," Raikes cut in, "the fat gentleman with a salmon under his arm."

"Luck will have to be with us," said the other; "for we can't take many men. Rapid traveling is our only chance—as rapid as anything can be in this old, worn-out land. Our efforts will be wasted, if we arrive an hour too late."

"Then get a move on, my son!" said Raikes. "I'm ready to start tonight."

They went out together into Legation Street, where the very first person they came across was Wo Hung, the beggar.

*In the concluding chapters Archer journeys to the Temple of Seven Stars and solves the mystery of the Silver Shoe*

# *Prairie Feud*

## *A Western Novelette*

*By* WILLIAM CORCORAN

THE town of Krag lay under a deep blanket of snow, and as the silent fury of the blizzard maintained itself hour upon hour that white, stifling mantle grew deeper. Along the short single street of the prairie town irregular depressions in the snow marked the recent passage of the few natives who had ventured outside; and even these were being silently filled by the gusty swirls that tore around corners of houses and piled up the soft crystals in great drifts.

Sam Stedman, sheriff of Cameron County, emerged from the warmth of the Golden Calf saloon; with head down to the wind, plowed through the snow past the hardware store, past the Chinese restaurant, past two more shacks of nondescript appearance, and with ungainly, running steps, reached the porch of the Lucky Lode saloon and flung himself through the doors. He halted just within to shake off the clinging snow, and opening his bulky fleece jacket, he walked to the bar. Two indolent punchers cooperating in a game of solitaire nodded to him. A stocky man leaning against the bar greeted him with a lazy "Howdy!" The barkeep grinned, remarked about the difficulties of sheriffing in winter time, and slid a bottle and glass across the bar.

Five men gave no notice of his entry. They were seated around a table near one end of the bar playing poker, and the silent tenseness of the game bespoke the great strain under which each man played. They did not lift their eyes, monosyllables announced their moves, and nervous fingers shuffled the cards and dropped chips on the center of the board with harsh little clicks.

Sheriff Sam Stedman permitted a faint touch of wryness to register on his face as he watched the play. These men had been playing here for almost forty-eight hours. For two days they had kept alive a game that in size of stakes or plain thrills was little deserving of such an honor. Grimly they held on, with occasional periods of relief, with a steady consumption of whisky, until their hands shook as they picked up their cards and their faces were gaunt and red eyed.

The will power to flog their failing spirits into a semblance of desire issued from one man like a palpable force. He sat with back to the wall, so that the whole room and the entrance were before him.

*Concerning the story the author writes:*

*I felt, in writing this yarn, the sense of impotence and pity that must grip a sane observer when the war clouds are brewing. I was not interested in displaying the quick draw skill of dull witted killers. The tragedy of men of peace, men of the soil, leaving their quiet acres to stake their lives against what they regarded as the forces of evil—that was my theme.*

His white Stetson was pulled down and his eyes burned with a dull glow in the shadow of its brim. He was a big man, clothed in a suit of fine black serge, shod in boots of soft Russian leather. His shoulders bulked broad and powerful above the table, and his strong hands dwarfed the cards. His jaw, set like a clamp now, with lips thin and bloodless, was at once square and finely cast. A black mustache, full though cut short, and a nose of predatory cast, completes an inventory as indicative of ruthless power as ever a man's appearance could be.

His name, a name to conjure with through all the vast miles of Cameron County, was Colin Campbell. He was the second of that name, since his father's death a year before he sat like a feudal baron in the great house on the uncounted acres of the C Bar C ranch.

One of the players, a lean and lithe figure of a man somewhere in the thirties, suddenly broke the silence with a curse. He held the cards in his hand as though to crush them; then he dropped them to the board and reached to the floor beside his chair. The whisky bottle that was produced he held to his lips for a long drink. When it was lowered to the floor again he sat watching the play with a smouldering immobility.

Moments passed. The pot was won; the cards dealt once more; and all passed. The next man shuffled dextrously, dealt the hands, and curt monosyllables announced the continuation of the game. But the smouldering one abruptly flamed. His voice cracked with weariness, uttered a dry torrent of blasphemy, and he flung the cards headlong across the table to scatter over the floor.

There was the harsh sound of a scraping chair; then, as perfect silence suddenly followed, the words of the tall man who sat back to the wall were distinct and low.

"Harker, don't you move. Another word and I'll break your jaw."

The lean man stared across the table at the big one in the dark clothes, and his teeth were bared and a harsh sound of breathing came from between them. He sat immobile as he had frozen in the act of shoving away from the table, and his hands gripped the edge of the board with straining strength.

"To hell with you!" he said. "I'm through."

But he did not move. And the big man held his gaze. Against the extended thigh of the lean one a holstered gun thrust up its butt not far from the white knuckled hand of its owner. Beneath a coat lapel of the other a gun butt was also visible, held in place by a spring clip holster.

"Draw," said Colin Campbell and the very word was an insult. "Draw—you rat!"

Still the lean one did not move.

The sheriff, who had not altered his position at the bar, gave no sign. In Krag these things ran their course. It was up to the lean man.

Then, as the fellow neither moved nor spoke further, Colin Campbell rose slowly from his chair. His eyes still held the gaze of the man before him. Deliberately Campbell circled the table, a lean legged wolf of a man, his hands at his sides.

The man called Harker gasped with a sharp intake of breath, and his chair crashed to the floor behind him as he sprang to his feet. His hand snatched at the gun on his thigh, brought it flashing from the holster.

But Campbell, too, leaped. One hand caught the wrist of Harker, and held the gun pointing midway to its intended target before the man could fire. No further did Campbell move; he simply gripped the thin wrist of the other, and his jaw muscles set in knots as he slowly twisted it about. Harker attempted once to catch the gun in his left hand. He failed, and groaned suddenly with the agony that clutched at his wrist. The gun fell from his tortured fingers. Then he clamped his lips and fought silently, straining to release his hand, yet barely able to move for the pain.

The two figures stood there for minutes, while every man in the saloon watched. Harker grew pale and the whites of his eyes gleamed with ghastly fear. Slowly his sinewy frame bent beneath the weight of Campbell, and as his knees bowed he came closer and closer to the floor. Once again he groaned, and the sound was torn from his very depths.

Then in an instant it was over. Colin Campbell, his lips drawing to a livid grimace of contempt, released his grip; like lightning his hand snapped back, forward again, and with a sickening crack struck the face of Harker before the man had moved from his crouching position. He moved now. He was flung headlong across the floor, where he lay as he had fallen, his face hidden, motionless.

Colin Campbell walked around the table, lifted a whisky bottle, drank deeply, and sat down. Picking up his cards, he said, "The pot is open, gentlemen, for one blue chip."

SHERIFF SAM STEDMAN was twenty-eight, and he was more honest than he was ambitious. He made no fetish of his honesty; it was simply an ingrained characteristic of the man. By it he had won his office, and many times he cursed it for the burden it imposed on him.

He was the balance of power between two parties of equal strength and ruthlessness. The first Campbell had come into the country when the Indians still disputed a white man's bare existence there. He arrived with money and ambitions of feudal grandeur. Dominating every obstacle, even the Indians, he had for a brief interval attained that arrogant state. Then the nesters had come.

The first of them was John Kennedy. He had been with Moseby's guerrillas during the war; had raised hell in general in various parts of Texas thereafter, had joined a herd trailing north when the consequences of his reckless behavior threatened to become serious; and when the herd was broken up in Nebraska, he had kept going by himself. Eventually he met a girl who was like no other girl in the world, and when he went on a little further, he found the sage country of Cameron to his liking, and settled there. Soon after he sent for the girl, and in a sod hut adjoining a pole corral he tackled the grim task of surviving the winters of starvation until fortune should reward his fortitude.

John Kennedy labored mightily, thereby confusing the arrogant wisdom of Colin Campbell, who had expected the little sod hut to be deserted and decayed with the coming of that first spring. Instead, other springs saw a rough cabin replace the hut; and still later one saw a fine sound frame house raise itself beyond that. Meantime these improvements had not come in peace. There was war, on a small scale at first, but as other venturesome settlers passed by, looked upon John Kennedy's labors and their fruits, and thereupon stayed

where they stopped, that war became a fierce and mighty struggle. This great empty land that Campbell had come to regard as every inch his own by right of conquest. There were killings, and cruel, brutal deeds; and as the hearts of these simple, stubborn men cleaved to the land about them, their minds hardened and forgot pity. They could not afford to remember too much of the softness of life, these pioneers.

The situation was stalemate when Sam Stedman came into the country. He had the bearing of a gentleman, which won him old Colin Campbell's arrogant tolerance; and he was penniless, even as the nesters had been, which inclined them in his favor. Besides, he was honest, which gained him the respect of both sides. He was probably the only man in the county who dared to accept the job—anyway, he was elected sheriff by an overwhelming vote.

When Sam Stedman entered his little office across the street from the Lucky Lode this February afternoon, he rolled a cigarette before the stove and then let it hang cold from his lips while he pondered deeply over the scene he had just left. Colin Campbell's action had been characteristic; every man in that country had seen him in such a moment, and sights like those are apt to breed an uncommon fear in a man.

But the point that stuck in Stedman's mind like a bone in the throat was: why did Colin Campbell keep those four men playing poker with him hour upon hour after all desire for play had been satiated? A dozen times during the past two days Sam had entered the saloon, and each time the five were as he had last seen them. The lesser four were underlings at best; there was no thrill for Colin in winning their paltry bankrolls. True, they were gamblers—and worse. The Campbells had always hired that sort of men. Yet it was absurd to say that he endured such an ordeal merely to enjoy their skill.

As a peace officer, Sam had learned to anticipate many things in which he would be officially concerned. His mind had become trained to work that way. And now it suggested with cold logic that the Campbell kept himself unwaveringly in the public eye for one grim purpose—an alibi. Pursuing that train of thought, he faced the question: an alibi for what?

For what, indeed? What cruel thing was being done out on the snow swept prairie even now as he stood warm and sheltered in the little office? What crime, what further misery was to descend on the lovely land that he had made his home, a land that bred its sons to kill and its daughters to hate?

Sam groaned aloud with the bitterness of that awful question.

Out of the wind and the snow, hoof beats silenced in the drifts along the street, there came a horse and rider who were revealed through the window of the sheriff's office as no more than a vague blur in the storm. But the sound of hasty feet stamping on the hollow board sidewalk beneath the blanket of crystals brought Sam to the door with one stride. He flung it open and a muffled, indistinguishable figure lurched into the office.

Immediately he threw aside the wraps that concealed him, and cried in a voice weighted with anguish and ridden by a demon of hate, "They killed him! By Christ, they killed him at last! They murdered him with bullets, and they riddled him from behind. Oh, the dogs—the black, rotten dogs!"

The sheriff's heart was in the grip of a hand of ice, and cruelly it held him. The boy before him, no more than nineteen, was the only surviving son of old John Kennedy.

The question was answered.

The boy's voice had broken hoarsely with his last imprecation. Sobs choked him now. He was a slim, fair haired youngster; his eyes were blue and his broad mouth could be finely sensitive or remarkably cruel. He stood before Stedman and looked in the sheriff's eyes, and his throat was convulsed with agony. His hands tore suddenly at his shirt collar as if thereby to release his vocal cords.

"I found him myself," the boy cried then, "out in the south pasture. He was gone all night. He hadn't been home for dinner even. I went lookin' for him soon as light came this morning. I found him three hours later. A heap of snow, that was him. Covered, frozen, he and his black horse. Killed—bullet holes in his back, in —his head. Horse killed." The boy stood speechless, his mouth opened to frame words he could not find. Then he covered his face with his hands and cried, "Oh,

they got him. They got him at last. Damn them, oh, *damn* them!"

Sam Stedman stepped to his desk, and from a deep drawer took out a bottle of whisky. He found a glass and poured a stiff drink. "Here, Joe; take this," he ordered. The boy looked up and clutched at the glass. His lips were blue with cold.

"I'm going right out with you," said the sheriff. He hesitated, and added, "Your father was a good man. He was my friend—" He halted uncertainly again. Then quietly enough he continued, "I'll get you another horse down at the livery stable; I guess that one outside must be near killed with the ride in." He turned to take down his heavy coat from a wall hook.

"Is Colin Campbell in town?" The question came in a voice which had altered greatly. The boy did not ask this information with convulsed throat.

Sam Stedman stood with his hands holding the coat just above the hook for a perceptible interval. Here was a moment when he must deserve his sheriff's star. Here was a moment, indeed, to try his mettle as a man. He could not disarm and subdue this crazed boy as he might an irresponsible criminal. He might thereby prevent a killing—but the wrath of the men who followed the Kennedys would burst all bounds and precipitate a holocaust he dared not conceive. He was powerless to invoke the authority of his office against either side, for fear of consequences that would engulf that feeble authority in a tidal wave of blood.

He turned from the wall, coat in hand, his face calm. "Suppose he is, Joe. What of it?"

Written plainly on the youth's face was the purpose he thought to conceal with guile. "I—I want to know."

"He is," said the sheriff. "He's been in town to my knowledge for two whole days—since before you last saw your father. He's been playing poker over at the Lucky Lode for nearly forty-eight hours without stopping for sleep, or once getting out of sight of a dozen men."

JOE KENNEDY studied the sheriff, trying to test in his eyes the truth of that information. To be sure, old John Kennedy and Sam Stedman had been friends in a reserved, man to man fashion; but the boy knew well what motives would dictate Sam Stedman's actions now. Not friendship; only a hard, impersonal justice; and justice in that raw country had often been notoriously blind.

In young Kennedy's eyes a madness gathered. His face was tear streaked; boy though he was, the lines of grief marred its clean youthfulness. He glanced toward the door, seemed to crouch as he stood. Sam Stedman watched, took a breath, and suddenly moved.

But already he was too late. He had discarded his gun belt, and now he gazed impotently into the muzzle of a revolver gripped in young Joe's slender hand. "You keep out of this," the boy said. "You keep clear. Colin Campbell has an alibi maybe, but I know him. *I know!*" He backed toward the door, his left hand fumbling for the knob. His white teeth bared between cold, pale lips.

With a lurch he flung the door wide open and lunged into the storm.

Sam Stedman whirled about and yanked the revolver from the gun belt hanging on the wall. Through the open door he ran in turn, crossing the street in great leaps through the deep snow. He saw the neglected horse standing near the office door, shivering. A glow of warmth opened to the blizzard from the doorway of the Lucky Lode, and a darting shadow passed inside. Stedman jumped for the porch, slid and almost fell, recovered himself and plunged through the door.

Inside the saloon was the peace and quiet that comes with the suspension of life during such a storm as this. Four men were about the room, and of these only the bartender displayed no amazement at the youth who stood in the center of the floor waving his gun. The barkeep was motionless behind the mahogany, hands on the bar edge, eyes fixed on young Kennedy, waiting. The three customers stood speechless, with eyes wide. The table to one side of the room, where the grim five had played their game, was deserted.

Colin Campbell had flown.

Sam Stedman stepped up beside the boy just as he was demanding, "Where is he? Damn you—where is Colin Campbell?" The sheriff flicked upward with his open hand, struck down so that the edge of the hand caught young Kennedy smartly on the wrist supporting the gun. The revolver clattered to the floor. Sam retrieved it

promptly, and faced the snarling boy with a tight lipped, wry little smile.

"Come on, Joe," he said. "We got a long ride ahead of us."

Suddenly the boy surrendered; his very spirit seemed to collapse. He permitted the officer to lead him out of the saloon, and the mystified customers at the bar heard the echo of a sob as the door slammed shut behind the pair.

The killing was never solved—officially. In the driving snow Sam Stedman rode out of Krag with young Joe to the low, comfortable ranch house of the Katydid brand. They stopped a moment at the house while Aileen, Joe's older sister, made hot coffee to warm them and the younger ones of old John's brood gathered around in silent watchfulness. They then went on to the south pasture.

Sam found nothing to aid him in fixing the identity of the murderer. The snow covered all tracks, and tracks would have been about the only clue to work on. The depression where Kennedy had lain in his own frozen blood was but a faint hollow in the smooth carpet of snow. The dead horse remained where he had fallen, a white indistinguishable mound. That was all.

The sheriff made inquiries about the country, but no more fruitless task had he ever undertaken. The replies of the Campbell men were smooth and given most readily. Naturally enough, they were of no help in directing his search. The little ranchers, on the other hand, were even surly. Bitter was the memory of this crime in their hearts, and they had small hope for the law to avenge it.

As the days passed it became a half forgotten incident of the winter; or, at least, one discussed only in guarded moments. It was a dead topic of conversation before the saloon bars, and even the Campbell men ceased to arrive in town only in bands of four or more. The son of old John was never heard to utter a word about his father's death.

Yet no one realized more than Sheriff Sam Stedman how that murder lived on in the minds of men. There had been killings before, clean, open and shut affairs of a decisive nature; and though they bred hate, still they did not fester in dark corners of the soul as this did. Sam sat in his office time after time when he descried a body of men riding into town, his nerve tensed to hear the first crashing volley of gun fire that would usher into Cameron County a war that would end only in extermination.

The worst of winter passed, the sun came out earlier and stayed longer each day and its warmth increased. The bottoms thawed and the roads became alternately troughs of bottomless gumbo or rock like furrows of frozen mud. Soon the real thaw would come, the grass would spring up overnight, green and succulent, and the winter herds, scattering over the country, would reenact the miracle of life to the increase of each owner's brand. Then the outfits would forget all else and follow the beasts, working like demons for a few short weeks in the roundup camps and branding corrals. The whole world waited, weary with the buffeting of winter storms, for the coming of spring.

ONE day in late March, while the sun was setting in burnished glory among the blue hills far over the prairie, Sam Stedman leaned against the jamb of the open office door. He was gazing into the distance, immobile, when he saw far out on the road a moving horseman. He continued to watch, until he became aware that it was no man at all, but a woman—Aileen Kennedy at that.

Sam was not unwilling at that moment to talk with Aileen. Only a few times had he enjoyed that quiet pleasure, but her calm, almost Spartan philosophy of life, fostered by the conditions which surrounded her, seemed to make her a well of courage from which to draw all a man needed to sustain himself.

Aileen rode into the town, and passed by the stores and the resorts where the men sitting on the porches eyed her with admiration undisguised, and she drew to a halt directly at the sheriff's office. Before Sam could reach the horse's side to help her dismount, she had swung out of the saddle. Deftly she tied the reins to the rail, offering a smile of greeting the while.

"Howdy, Miss Kennedy," Sam returned. "Right nice evenin' for a ride."

The girl, clad in a simple gray riding dress, drew off her gloves as she stood on the sidewalk and pressed back a straying wisp of hair beneath her hat. "I rode in special," she said, "to talk with you." Her

blue eyes seemed to warn him of a certain gravity in her errand, and he hastened to place himself at her disposal.

"I hope you don't find the ride in vain," he offered with a touch of half bashful gallantry. "Let's go inside." He beckoned to the office door.

Inside the girl looked about her a moment before beginning. The desk, with papers scattered on its surface; the rifles in the rack against the rear wall; the unlovely faces peering down at her from reward notices tacked to the side walls: all these appointments seemed to interest her. Then she looked at Sam, and took a chair near the desk.

"It begins with father's death," she said. "I don't think you know any more about that now than the day you rode out with Joe in the blizzard."

"I don't," he admitted.

"Well, some others do." She paused a moment, then leaned forward in appeal. "Sam Stedman, you are the only man in the county who can stop this awful thing. Nobody else is clear of the blood that's been spilled during all these years. If this hate keeps growing and growing there's going to be a war that will leave this range without a man left alive on it!"

"I know." He spoke almost gruffly; it had the power to hurt cruelly, this reminder of his inadequacy. "I've been watching for weeks, waiting—"

"Then maybe you know how a woman is like to feel, Sam Stedman?"

He nodded, and his mouth was thin and drawn.

"Listen," the girl said. "Kelso Carson, that's Campbell's foreman, is supposed to have killed my father. I don't know how they found out, but the word has passed among the little ranchers, and God knows what it's going to mean. I couldn't learn a thing more; they won't tell me. Even Joe is savage when I try to talk to him. He's brooding and thinking—oh, and he's so young! Why can't men forget, and try to live in peace again? Even the children play at—at hanging people and things."

Sam Stedman's brain was afire. This was news! Kelso Carson was a man eminently fitted for the brutal task of murder. The man had claimed a watertight alibi, as had all the others at the C Bar C; and there was no possibility of implicating him at this late date. How well the followers of old Kennedy knew this! And how surely, if the suspicion became a conviction, would they act upon it.

"There's something stirring among my father's friends," the girl said. "They have seemed to put Joe in his place, and even the men who used to stop and play with him when he was a baby crawling on the floor are giving him the respect they gave my father. And he's no more able to lead those men than an insane person! Oh, it's terrible! I've been listening and watching and praying, till—" She hesitated and her eyes were glistening with tears. "Oh, God help this poor land!" She hid her face in her hands.

Sam stood up, and he placed a hand on her shoulder. "Miss Kennedy, I don't know what I can do; but when the time comes, I'm going to do it."

For a moment she seemed to welcome the strength in Sam's hand on her shoulder, and she remained quiet where she sat. Then she rose and looked him straight in the eye. "I'm trustin' you, Sam," she said. "You've got to do it."

"I—" he paused. "Well, no matter what happens, you'll know my sheriff's star has never been unfastened."

There was an implication behind that which made her catch her breath slightly, and her eyes widened as she gave her hand into his for farewell.

"God bless you, Sam Stedman," she said. "You're a man."

She turned and walked out of the office, and loosening the reins she mounted her horse and set off down the street straight into the crimson flood that came out of the hills in the west.

DAYS went by after that in which nature itself seemed hushed and still in dread expectation. Life in Krag droned on its uneventful way with a calmness and detachment that were graver signs than outspoken fear. The townsmen may have heard the rumor of Kelso Carson's supposed guilt, but no one could know from their behavior—unless he were old in the ways of those who live on the frontier.

Sam Stedman pursued his routine duties as before, though he kept always before him the one supreme task. The Law must be served! He rode much, traversing the country on every side, hoping to find one, anyway, of these steadfast men who would

abet his purpose with information, or perhaps even with the strength of his gun hand. But everywhere he met with the same watchful evasions. He was received cordially, even welcomed on the occasion that his visit to a lonely ranch house broke the monotony of early spring; yet he never once broke beyond the barren wall of reserve they had erected between him and their grim secrets.

Then spring came over the land with a rush, transforming a bleak drab country into a land of enchanted green, with riotous patches of larkspur flaunting their purple beauty in the hills, and the most barren wastes blooming into momentary loveliness with lush grass and fragile flowers. Even in Krag the sordid, unpainted boards of ancient shacks seemed to borrow an air of the picturesque to apologize for their unsightliness. In these few weeks nature lavished upon a beauty hungry world all the gifts which in milder climes are conserved through months of blooming life.

One morning about ten o'clock there arrived in Krag a body of riders numbering twelve, and as they rode along the short street their progress was followed from windows and doors of the town by silent, grave eyed watchers. Among these riders were the strongest and firmest of the nester clan, and their gathering now suggested an imminence of violence. They halted and dismounted before the Golden Calf and all passed inside.

An hour went by during which no sign came from the saloon. Then two more horsemen rode slowly into town, to dismount at the Golden Calf and joined the twelve. One of them, quiet, a little self-conscious of the staring eyes, was Joe Kennedy.

Sheriff Sam Stedman had witnessed these events from his office door. In the hour between the coming of the twelve and the arrival of young Joe he had taken down each rifle and revolver in the miniature arsenal the county supported, and had carefully oiled and loaded every weapon. And while he worked, he thought.

Later the shadow of peril fell even more darkly on the little town. Another body of riders advanced on Krag from afar, and Sam was in his doorway as they entered town at a gallop. Seventeen, he counted; sixteen hard men, dangerous as wolves; with a seventeenth the equal of all the rest together, Colin Campbell. The big rancher pulled his great bay gelding to a slithering halt in the dusty street and shouted in his formidable voice, "Hi, Sam Stedman! Come have a drink with the C Bar C."

Sam did not move. The invitation was not as cordial as the words would seem. There was an undertone of mockery that stung, jeering at his impotence as an officer. Sam eyed Campbell as the big man swung from the saddle, firmly holding his mettlesome horse, and Sam's silence was ample refusal of the invitation.

But Colin Campbell roared with laughter and handed the reins to one of the other riders. Then, turning his back, he led the way into the Lucky Lode saloon. Once again the street was deserted, except for the two groups of saddle horses at the rails.

The seeds of war had long ago been sown. Now waiting only for the eventful moment, the harvest was ready.

However, the events that followed set the little town by its ears with surprise and wonder. Noon came and went, and nothing happened. Then, close to one o'clock, the doors of the Golden Calf swung open and the nester clan filed out into the street as quietly as they had come. There was no sign of extended drinking on them: this the sheriff noted with gratification from his vigil in the office door. They were unhurried, and if they observed the line of horses farther along the street they gave no sign. They mounted, milled about during a moment of inaudible debate, and then rode down the street in the opposite direction to their coming. Soon they passed out of sight over a sage grown swell of land beyond the town.

But young Joe Kennedy had not been among their number.

A man stepped through the doors of the Lucky Lode just as the nester men were starting, and standing on the porch of the saloon, this man stared after them until they were no longer in sight. As he turned to reenter the place, Colin Campbell appeared. He glanced down the street, listened to the report of the watcher and frowned. For a moment he stood so; then he chuckled, took a cigar from his pocket, lighted it, and made some brief observation. The man laughed, promptly and with heartiness. Grinning broadly, Campbell returned inside the saloon.

Sam Stedman did not move from his post. The day was not over. The nesters knew of the arrival of the Campbell men, but their departure was too deliberate and sober to have been solely a move of discretion. Some carefully formed plan was in course of operation. It was possible only to wait—and watch.

SOON a white aproned figure emerged from the Golden Calf, looked up and down the street, and seeing the sheriff in his doorway, beckoned to him. Sam immediately crossed over. The bartender led him inside, and pointed to a row of chairs against one wall, on which reclined a still figure. It was young Joe, sprawled out in a stupor, pallid of face and breathing slowly.

"The kid's soused," the barkeep said. "You better have him hauled out of here. I don't want him around."

Sam was dumbfounded. It was incredible that young Joe should be reduced to a drunken stupor when the others had come and gone in complete sobriety. Approaching to the row of chairs, Sam was aware that the odor of alcohol was quite prominent in the air—even too much so. Apparently the boy had spilled the stuff all over him in his drunken awkwardness. He lay now appallingly still and quiet; he did not breathe stertorously, and his face was white rather than flushed with liquor.

A feeling of suspicion grew in the sheriff. There was more behind this than was apparent, and meantime the boy was in a state that looked to Sam's inexpert eye as really dangerous. Sam had seen men lying still and white in this fashion before, and the consequences were sometimes dire.

"Go get Doc Saunders," he ordered the barkeep. He did not bother questioning the man. There was no time now, besides he would certainly get no satisfaction.

"He needs an officer more than a sawbones," the other said in surly fashion. "I ain't—"

Sam turned on the fellow. "Get the Doc!" he repeated. His nerves were too much on the ragged edge to temporize. The bartender eyed him a second, and then turned and left the saloon without a word.

Sam opened the boy's shirt collar wider and placed the crumpled Stetson beneath his head. Young Joe was inert, completely unconscious.

In a few minutes the barkeep returned, with Doc Saunders in tow. Saunders was a taciturn, conscientious physician who had served this country for ten years. No one ever learned where he had taken his degree, but everyone respected his professional competence. He wore a thin, pointed beard that did not conceal the strength in his square jaw.

Briskly now he examined the boy. He turned up the eyelids, felt the pulse, listened to the heart action, and when he straightened up, glanced queerly at the inscrutable bartender who stood beside him.

"Doped," he announced. "Seems like chloral. Heart very bad. Probably not a heavy dose, but the boy hasn't the resistance of a mature man."

Chloral—Sam Stedman had heard that word before. In the same manner he had seen those others lying in this sodden state.

"Knock-out drops," he said aloud, and shrugged his shoulders with a grimace of ironic humor. He faced the saloon keeper. "How about it, fella?" he demanded.

"I don't know nothin' about knock-out drops," stated the other sourly. "I've never had 'em in the house."

"I saw the kid walk in here sober and perfectly normal," said the sheriff. "Now I want an explanation—pronto."

"Don't ask me, then. He sat at this table here all the while he was in here. Half a dozen of that gang sat here with him. They had a bottle of whisky on the table, and I stayed behind the bar servin' the rest of 'em that was lined up at it. Nobody seemed to drink much; they was mostly talkin' among themselves; and then they got up and walked out. They left the kid behind, and he didn't move, sittin' in the chair with his head on the table. I came over to wake him up and couldn't get a peep outa him. That's all I know. I went out and called you."

Sam and the doctor exchanged glances. Doc Saunders grunted, but beyond the sceptical gleam in his eye he offered no opinion. "Better get the boy some place where he can lay without being disturbed," he said. "You can fight this out between yourselves after."

"Is he in any danger, Doc?" Sam asked.

"No." Saunders shook his head reassuringly. "He'll probably be sick when he wakes up—and it's going to be many hours before he does wake up—but he'll come

out of it all right. No need to worry. Just put him where he can sleep it out undisturbed."

Sam considered. He eyed the saloonkeeper, then returned to Joe. "All right, we'll take him over to my office. I'll probably be there pretty steady for the next twenty-four hours, and I want to be around when the kid wakes up. That all right?"

"Sure, if you have a cot or something for him."

"I have." With that Sam slid his hands under the boy's body, and lifted him gently but with the sureness of strong arms. Holding him so that his head fell on his shoulder, Sam carried him out and across the street; and in the office stretched him out on a leather covered couch against one side wall. Throwing a blanket over his body he left him, breathing almost inaudibly.

That was the first of the day's remarkable events. Sam's passage with young Joe across the street had been observed, and the story quickly went all over town. Sam had visitors whose curiosity overcame their sense of discretion, but to all he refused admission and he gave no one any information. It afforded him grim amusement to be on the other side of the fence for once.

All afternoon, after having his dinner sent in from the Chinese restaurant, he sat in the little office near the door—waiting.

Across the street the C Bar C men became increasingly noisy. They had been drinking steadily ever since they arrived, and by mid afternoon they were royally drunk. The purpose of their visit was not at all apparent from any activity they engaged in; and Sam came to a shrewd conclusion that the news of the gathering of the nesters had somehow been relayed to the C Bar C ranch, possibly by a watcher in the hills who covered the roads with binoculars. With the readiness for action that was characteristic of Colin Campbell the gang had immediately dropped all other occupations and followed the nesters into town. Obviously the departure of the nesters soon after had puzzled them, but apparently convinced that the little ranchers had been intimidated, the Campbell gang remained behind to celebrate the easy victory. The celebration gave promise of being one of unusual proportions.

At three o'clock the false front of the Lucky Lode shook with the vibration of strident, unmusical song from inside. A tinny piano banged out melodies and roaring voices rumbled obscene words. Laughter, shouts, the occasional crash of a chair or a smashed bottle hinted at the size of the shindig. Elsewhere in the town profound peace prevailed. Townsmen stayed under cover and storekeepers appeared at their doors only to turn the keys in the locks. They knew what was coming.

So, too, did Sam Stedman; and in a grimly wrathful fashion he awaited it.

THE sun was just beginning to cast the first lengthy shadows of late afternoon when the doors of the Lucky Lode burst open with a crash. The body of a man was propelled violently through and the fellow continued under the momentum of his start across the porch, down the three steps onto the wooden sidewalk; and from there he rolled into the dust of the road almost under the hoofs of the horses. The animals, weary with the hours of standing at the rail, shied now with snorts of fear, and left the inert body of the ejected one in a cleared space. He flopped on his back and did not move further.

In the doorway of the saloon the big frame of Colin Campbell stood for a moment, shouting in exultant blasphemy. His heavy features were darker than usual and his eyes were ablaze. He stood on his legs as steadily as when he was cold sober. He was of that rare type of human whose faculties seem unimpaired by alcohol while his brain is seized with a cunning madness.

Sam Stedman made no move to interfere yet. He had no interest in the fellow in the dust of the street; that one, at least, was out of the affair; and the bull pen behind the office would never hold them all.

Colin Campbell disappeared again, but not for long. He emerged once more, leading his whole gang; and he drove them to their mounts. "Fork your hosses, you drunken sons of polecats!" he roared. "Damn your souls, we'll show this spot in the road a real man! Show 'em a cattleman as is a cattleman, not a mangy two bit farmer! Up, you half breed Siwashes, or by all the devils in hell, I'll blast you from here to Kingdom Come!"

In his hand there was a .45 Colt, and he fired between the feet of the stumbling

men who strove to obey him. For a moment the confusion was worse than ever. But those who could, climbed into their saddles; and as Campbell leaped on his own big mount he forgot the others who were too far gone to master the problem of ascent.

Wheeling the gelding about, Campbell roared a command to his men and swept along the street at a gallop. A dozen riders followed, and inspired by his example, drew their revolvers and fired a staccato rattle of shots to the accompaniment of shrill cries. A tinkle of broken glass came from somewhere along the street. A gaunt yellow dog, terrified by the noise, broke from an alley and raced down the sidewalk. Abruptly, as though caught by an invisible cord, he tripped, turned head over heels, and after rolling a couple of feet, lay limp and twitching on the boards.

These men were not just working off an excess of spirits. They were intoxicated with their own strength and with the easy conquest they had made. Sam Stedman knew how small was their regard for his presence in town. Nevertheless he eased his gunbelt about his waist so the holster came more forward, and stepped out into the street.

The cavalcade was returning, with Campbell still in the van. He spied Sam standing quietly in the dust of the road and jabbed the spurs into the bay. The sound of hoofs on the hard packed earth was like the rolling beat of a great drum.

Then, as he was almost upon the officer, and he saw that Stedman made no move to escape, standing with legs braced, eyes narrowed, hands at waist, Colin Campbell abruptly reined in and threw up an arresting hand. Confusion fell upon the charging riders immediately and there was a great raising of dust, shrill protests from frightened horses, cries of alarm from the men, and one rider, none too securely seated, was thrown headlong over his mount's head. He took the fall with the instinctive skill of an old rider, and as he rolled over and sat up dazedly, the full brunt of Colin Campbell's wrath fell on his head. The big man stormed, cursing the drunken awkwardness of his men till they were awed to silence. As order was restored, Campbell turned his attention to the officer before him in the street, and his bloodshot eyes narrowed as he edged his horse closer.

"You lookin' for something, Stedman?" he asked thinly.

Sam shook his head. "Nothing. I wanted you to hear me. You're to get out of town and take your men with you. And right away."

Campbell's broad mouth lifted on one side in a snarling smile. "You're ordering me out of town? So you got some spunk in you after all! But supposin' I don't go?"

"I'll arrest you. You're disturbing the peace."

"You'll arrest *me!*" Amazement was in the cattleman's voice, and though his face grew more flushed, there was curiosity too, and it downed the anger that had started up. "How in hell will you arrest me?"

"The only way you could find out would be to submit peacefully. Because, Campbell, if you want to argue the point—" Stedman left the rest unsaid, and there was no mistake as to his meaning. Not once did his eyes flinch. Two bright spots on his cheeks emphasized the grimness of his face. He stood as still as a rod of steel, and his every muscle was tense with readiness.

Colin Campbell said nothing for a full minute. He strove with the intensity of his gaze to batter down the fierce will of the sheriff. No other man in the street moved as the two stood in deadlock, and scarcely did they breathe. In Campbell's hand the .45 Colt hung downward. Only a slight jerk of the gun would bring it up to blast the life from the officer. But Stedman's right hand was only two inches from the walnut butt of his own gun, and a man, even while he dies, can often even matters with a last reflex jerk of his trigger finger.

Then Campbell chuckled, deep in his throat. He paused, and chuckled again, and laughed outright. He raised his head and roared to the heavens, and for an instant swayed in his saddle. He was suddenly drunk. Looking at Stedman once more he carefully lifted the gun in his hand and thrust it inside his coat to its holster.

"By all the angels in hell," he said, "no man ever bluffed me before! You didn't bluff me, Sam Stedman; but I don't want to kill you yet. I got to save you a while."

He swayed in his saddle again, and for a second a film passed over his eyes. Straightening up, he turned to his men. "Come along, damn you all; we been kicked out and we're going home." Laughing enormously at this last, Colin Campbell jabbed his horse and swept by Stedman at a gallop. The twelve, joined by two others who had managed to find their seats, strung out after him without a word, and the whole cavalcade passed out of the town.

Stedman walked to the door of the Lucky Lode, called in for the barkeep, and made him carry the unconscious man on the road into the saloon. Sam confiscated the fellow's gun. The only remaining straggler sat on the edge of the porch holding his head. Sam approached him, lifted the .45 from his holster, and carrying the two revolvers with him, recrossed the street and disappeared into his office shack.

Through that long night Sam Stedman remained in the chair at his desk. The lamp that hung from the ceiling was turned low. Never once did the boy on the couch stir in his profound slumber. As the hours wore on his breathing became more normal, and the color in his face returned; but consciousness was still hours off.

Occasionally Sam dozed. He welcomed such intervals, for he felt he would need the rest on the morrow, and no slightest alarm could escape his vigilance now even when his head dropped forward in five or ten minutes sleep.

More often he smoked cigarettes and thought. His thoughts took a somber course, for they had found a grim parallel to explain the mysterious doping of Joe Kennedy that noon. They ranged from the still form of the boy on the couch to the drawn face of Colin Campbell the second night of that two day poker game last winter—the game that gave Colin an alibi in the murder of Old Kennedy. It was not at all unlikely that young Joe had been provided with an alibi in turn by men who proved their kindliness by desperate measures. Certainly he would never have consented to remain behind when the nesters rode to exact the ultimate vengeance from Kelso Carson—if that really had been their errand that day. In a brutal but effective fashion, they had thrust an alibi upon him.

Whatever the purpose of the little ranchers, it had been accomplished or defeated hours ago. It was too late for interference.

MORNING was slow in coming, but at last the pale grayness of early dawn surrendered before the full flush of day; the town stirred and went about its first chores and prepared for the business of living another twenty-four hours. These people of Krag were fatalists; if war broke out they would probably be ruined in the aftermath, but as they had no say in the matter, they shrugged shoulders and went about their tasks as usual.

Sam Stedman had a passerby tell the Chinaman to bring him breakfast and with it a full pot of strong coffee. With that inside him he felt better, and settled down patiently again to continue his vigil.

At ten o'clock came the first move. A rider entered town at a gallop, and jumped from his saddle before the office. The horse was branded C Bar C. Sam moved quickly to the door. The messenger rushed up to him.

"Sheriff, Kelso Carson was murdered yesterday afternoon," he said in a grating voice. "He was strung up to a cottonwood at Dean's Ford on the creek. His carcass was loaded with lead, and this paper was pinned to his shirt." He held out a tattered piece of plain brown paper. It was perforated at one place with a little round hole; a brownish red incrustation stained part of it; yet, crudely printed with a pencil, the following words were clearly legible:

THIS IS A WARNIN FOR ALL
MURDRERS IN CAMERON
COUNTY HERAFTER

"When did this happen?" demanded Sam.

"We found him this mornin', after lookin' for him since sun-up. He did'nt show up at all last night, and he was stone cold when he was cut down. We figger it happened yesterday afternoon."

"Does Colin Campbell know this?"

The man smiled a thin crooked smile. "If you could hear him you wouldn't ask."

"Then he sent you in. Does he want me to investigate?"

"If I was you, fella," said the puncher significantly, "I'd get me a hoss, quick; and get out there and find out."

The sheriff's eyes narrowed as he stared at the messenger. Then, shrugging his shoulders with a wry grimace, he turned

into the office. As he buckled on his gun belt he instructed the rider: "Go tell Doc Saunders to come along. He's deputy coroner around here, and we'll do this thing up brown." As the man started away Sam added, "And tell Duffy the blacksmith to close his shop and come over. I need a deputy to hold down the office. Tell him not to forget his gun."

For two hours the stolid figure of Pete Duffy sat in the doorstep of the office shack. Duffy was a man of peace for all his brawn; yet the size of the pistol that protruded from his pants top was in grim earnest of his intentions did anyone offer to dispute his authority. He nodded dourly to neighbors who hailed him, and he refused several offers of a drink, sucking on his pipe and spitting vigorously into the dust of the road. Then at high noon the sheriff and the doctor returned.

They went directly to the side of the couch on which young Joe still slumbered. Doc Saunders felt his pulse, and as he dropped the boy's hand, Joe stirred in his sleep. The doctor addressed him, shaking him gently by the shoulder.

For a moment, as Joe opened his eyes, he stared dumbly into the faces above him. The doctor's voice, urging him to awaken, stirred him to move, and automatically he rose on one elbow while he stared about without recognition. He swung his feet to the floor, and held his head in his hands as though but partly awake. Then abruptly he looked up at them, alarm in his widening eyes.

"Stedman! Where—what happened? Where did they go?"

"Who, Joe?"

"The gang. The—" Young Joe halted, looking into Sam's eyes. He read danger of some sort in that steady gaze and his stare went in bewildered fashion past them through the open door out to the street. Then he demanded frantically, "How did I get here? What happened? Sam, don't devil me! Tell me, for God's sake!"

The doctor drew back. Stedman spoke evenly. "I guess you know what happened, Joe. Your friends have more consideration for you than for themselves. They gave you an alibi: you were doped with knock-out drops, and you've been sleeping here for the past twenty-four hours. That left plenty of time for the lynching of Kelso Carson."

The youngster paled, but no emotion appeared on his face. He was shocked to a sufficient degree of wakefulness now to shield his thoughts behind a mask that was unnatural in one so young. "Tell me about it, Sam," he asked.

The sheriff unhooked the cartridge belt and threw it on the desk. "Oh, there's nothing much to tell," he said grimly. "It happened at Dean's Ford on the creek. Campbell had his men out hunting for him when Kelso didn't show up last night, and they found him strung up to a cottonwood with a note pinned to his shirt. He was all shot up too. They took him to the ranch house and when I went out Campbell was like a crazy man with the mad he was having over this. We couldn't find a sign of whoever might have done it—they don't know even how the lynch party got Kelso alone. Nobody remembers just when he was seen last, beyond at breakfast yesterday. That's all. Doc Saunders impaneled a coroner's jury among the hands— And by the way, they wanted to return a verdict charging you with murder. I suggested they make it 'at the hands of parties unknown,' so they did; and then we rode back to town."

A cruel joy crept into the boy's gleaming eyes during this recital. He chuckled at Sam's statement regarding the verdict. He knew without being told that the "suggestion" was one that doubtless had to be backed with a gun. For the moment he forgot the crude trick that had been played on him to avoid just such a charge from a coroner's jury. For months he had awaited the squaring of his grim score, and his philosophy was too simple and direct to allow even a moment of regret at its consummation.

Out in the street they heard then the sound of many horses. Stedman motioned to the others to keep back, and he went to the door. He stood there silent, almost like one at bay, watching. Colin Campbell had come to town, erect and black with suppressed wrath, and behind him rode a force of men that Sam found by swift count to number twenty-six.

Campbell ignored the sheriff. He halted in the road before the Lucky Lode and stared up and down the street. There was no sign that any of his enemies were in town, no horses stood at the hitch rails and the few watchful eyed men in sight

were all townsmen. Campbell dismounted and stalked through the doors of the saloon, leaving his men to follow as they tied their mounts.

Young Joe had watched them from the rear of the room. He licked his lips dryly and faced the sheriff as Sam turned from the door. "Sam," said the youngster, "do I get my gun back?"

"You better stay right here, and leave guns alone," said Stedman. "All hell won't save you if you wander into one of those hombres with a gun on you and me out of sight."

"That so!" jeered the boy. "You give me my gun—by God, let me just have one shell in it and I'll go across the street and tell Colin Campbell who'll be next to decorate a cottonwood around this country!"

"That's just why you're not going to have a gun," the sheriff replied dryly.

The boy subsided, smoldering by himself as he sat on the couch watching the door of the saloon just visible to him across the street. The doctor went off, saying he would have the Chinaman send in dinners for the two of them. Pete Duffy accompanied him, taking along both his big gun and his dour air of authority.

A man stepped through the doors of the Lucky Lode, glanced casually once up and down the street, and dropped into a chair. He tilted the chair backward against the wall, and pulling his hat brim down over his eyes, busied himself languidly at whittling a stick he picked up from the porch floor.

AN HOUR later the man on the porch of the Lucky Lode raised his eyes. Out on the road beyond the farthest shacks he was able to see clearly a body of riders approaching town. He watched them for an interval, then unconcernedly went on with his idle occupation.

Stedman in turn had been observing this man, and now he went to the door and looked down the road for himself. It took no extended study to recognize the newcomers. They advanced at a steady pace, raising a cloud of dust in the air after them, and without an exception they were men, or sons of men who ranched in the little places along Aspen Creek.

The town was unnaturally quiet as they rode up the street. The idler on the saloon porch did not so much as raise his eyes again, though he folded up his jack-knife, threw away the hacked stick, and began to whistle a tune, rolling a cigarette the while. The nester men, numbering more than twenty, eyed this man deliberately as they dismounted and filed into the Golden Calf.

"Is that them?" young Joe demanded as the sheriff turned about. When Stedman nodded the boy grinned in hard fashion and remarked, "I guess I can get a gun now if I want one, Sam."

The sheriff stood in the center of the room, facing young Kennedy. "Boy," he said slowly, "you got a terrible responsibility on your shoulders right this minute. I ain't worth a hoot in hell to stop what's likely to begin very soon. You ain't worth much more—but you sure can start it. What are you aimin' to do?"

It was the boy's first impulse to jeer, but a shadow of doubt crossed his face. He did not answer the question.

"Joe, ever since you were born," Stedman went on, "this country has been ripped wide open every so often, a couple of men killed, and then patched up again. There's never been a real, honest-to-God moment of peace in it. And what has all the killings accomplished? Nothing—except the suffering of women and children."

Young Joe Kennedy was not entirely calloused of soul. His soul was warped, perhaps, but the stuff it was made of was not base. And now, with the murderous purpose of long months of bitterness abruptly satisfied, that soul was capable of feeling an emptiness, a desire for some other quest to satisfy the latent idealism of his nature. Joe was a dreamer without ever knowing it, for he had lived all his dreams in tempestuous action.

"Your mother, Joe: you remember her, I know; and she died as surely a victim of this feud as your father. It killed her slowly, Joe, but it got her in the end. Your two older brothers—they would be fine men for this country to have as citizens now, and they're layin' out under the grass the same as plenty other brothers and sons. That's a terrible waste of God's biggest gift to us folks, boy: a real man."

"It ain't us that done it," the boy protested softly. This unexpected attack with the images of his beloved mother and of those tragic men, his brothers, hit him a blow most vital.

"Not directly, maybe; but you never

gave them a chance to save themselves. Think, Joe; for God's sake think—they died and their deaths accomplished nothing! Are you and those men across the street going to be killed off the same way?"

"I ain't afraid to die," said the boy. His voice was sharp.

"I know it," cried Stedman. "None of you are. That's the pity of it. But Joe—can't you make a sacrifice that's so much less than your life? Can't you work to stop this feud now that you've evened scores? Think what it would mean—peace and rest and prosperity for this country instead of grief and orphaned children and deserted ranches!"

The boy was silent. He did not look at the sheriff, but his eyes glowed with some inner fire. A spark of the burning appeal in Stedman's words had ignited his soul. His body might be weak now with the poison of the drug in its veins, but a greater strength had come to him.

"What are you going to do, Joe? It's between Colin Campbell and you."

The boy looked up. He seemed in a subdued fashion exalted, and the light of a fixed purpose shone in his face. "Between Colin Campbell and me," he repeated. "Him and me. Colin Campbell and—young Joe Kennedy, son of Old John! Oh, God, what a finish!"

"What's that, boy?"

The boy spoke swiftly. "Never mind. I'll do it. Do it proper, so this fightin' and warrin' won't happen any more. You go over to the Calf and get my crowd to come here and listen to me. I got to talk to them fellows first."

Sam Stedman stood suspicious, wondering, for a moment; but the boy urged him to obey his request. "Get them for me, Sam. I'm only doin' what you asked me to. I don't want to walk out of this office till I've said—till I've told 'em what I got to say."

Sam turned and strode out of the office, and crossing the street, disappeared inside the Golden Calf.

FIVE minutes later Sam Stedman recrossed the street alone. He was quite in the dark concerning young Joe's purpose, but the boy's sincerity was beyond question. Sam had delivered his message, and now he played his accustomed role of waiting and watching.

Even as he entered the office, observing that Joe had not moved from his seat in the rear, he saw from the corner of his eye two things. First that a group of men were emerging from the Golden Calf; and second, that the lone idler on the porch of the Lucky Lode had risen to his feet. Sam stopped in the doorway and leaned against the jamb, looking out.

The men of the nester outfit were five, and in a compact group they walked up the opposite sidewalk and stepped into the dust of the road. Evidently they had sent a delegation, expecting, perhaps, no more than the wrath of a sick and disappointed youngster. The delegation, however, was sharp eyed and alert, and they fastened their eyes on the man on the Lucky Lode porch.

Just what he did at that moment will never be determined. It is certain that he moved, and it may well be that his move was nothing more than a step to take him inside the saloon doors. Anyway, it was a move that never reached completion, for one of the five who were midway across the dusty road halted, drew the revolver swiftly from his holster, pulled trigger as the barrel leveled and shot the fellow on the Lucky Lode porch squarely in the center of the forehead. The fellow was dead before he sprawled on the grimy boards, though his own gun was clutched in his rigid right hand.

Immediately the five broke into a run. They had not taken two steps when a window of the Lucky Lode shivered into tinkling fragments and a gun thrust through, to explode with a shot that stopped the nester who had first fired. The man coughed, standing with shoulders hunched as if in pain; then his gun slipped from his fingers and he toppled forward in the street on his face.

The Lucky Lode literally boiled with men. Through the door they burst, out the windows, and they fired as they cleared their fellows. A second nester went down without raising his gun. A third stopped, turned in his tracks, and cursing in the awful blasphemy of grief, emptied his Colt at the mob rushing out of the saloon. Then he faced about again, staggered a few steps, and fell on the sidewalk beside the sheriff's office. His fingers clawed at the planks, striving vainly to drag him to the shelter of the corner of the shack a few feet

farther. The remaining two of the nester men divided, one dodging behind the office, the other flinging himself headlong in through the door.

Sam Stedman did the only thing possible, even for an officer sworn to preserve the peace at any cost. He swung the door closed with a crash, and threw the bolt home. At the desk he snatched his gunbelt and buckled it on. Next he jerked a rifle from the rack and took down a box of cartridges from a shelf above it. He stuffed these into his pockets as he advanced to the window in a crouch, peering outside.

By prompt action the Campbell force had taken possession of the street. The nester men had rushed to the door of the Golden Calf with the echo of the first shot, but they were met by a withering blast of fire and driven back inside. The swinging doors of the Golden Calf were streaked with yellow gashes where the glancing hail of bullets had torn their way.

Colin Campbell himself had issued forth among the first, and he immediately mounted his horse. His bellowing voice rose even above the rattle of gunfire in that first wave of battle. It was the voice of a man in the grip of madness, of one who has waited long for some frightful and inevitable disaster to break and who greets it with frenzied joy.

In the little office shack the nester who had taken shelter there, a young fellow of strong, awkward body, lantern jawed and somber eyed, stood in the center of the floor cursing over and over in murderous despair. Young Joe stood frozen, where he had leaped at the first shot, his face drawn of all color. Neither of the two seemed to be aware of the sheriff or of his actions.

The rattle of shots increased again, redoubled as a return fire broke from the corners of buildings down the street about the Golden Calf. The nester men had sallied out the back way and were fighting from cover. Colin Campbell gathered a dozen mounted men about him and galloped down the street in the very face of this new fire. Before the charge was half way there two horses were riderless. A couple of the animals were hit, and in pain and anger they broke in their stride and lashed out with iron shod heels, pitching and almost upsetting the other mounts. The charge became a headlong scramble on the part of the Campbell men to hold their seats, and as the nester men leaped out from cover and fired at point blank range, they turned about and fled back up the street. Colin Campbell stood firm, holding his terrified mount with a hand of iron, emptying his Colt into the faces of the men before him. Then, cursing with contorted features the men who had abandoned him, he whirled and raced after them. Not a bullet had touched him, though his hat was gone and the flaring skirts of his coat were torn in several places.

Young Joe Kennedy moved, as one who has broken from a trance. "Christ in heaven!" he cried hoarsely. "Oh, God, they'll murder them all. Sam! Sam, they'll shoot them all down!" He turned, gazed at the rifle rack against the rear wall, and snatched a Winchester from its rest. Two steps and he was at the desk, loading the magazine with the shells scattered from the box Sam had dumped there. Then glancing wildly at the young nester in the center of the room and at the sheriff, still crouching at the window, he leaped to the door. As he opened the bolt and flung the door wide he shouted to Sam, "Me or him, Sam Stedman. 'Twas you said it. Damn his soul, may it be both of us and not me alone!" And with that he rushed out, crouching low, the Winchester extended before him.

The Campbell men had not remained in the center of the street. Under the fire from below they had sought shelter in turn, and only a few of the mounted men whom Colin Campbell was striving to form into another charge were in plain sight. Colin Campbell himself was out of young Joe's line of fire, as several of the mounted men were before him. Joe eyed the group, brought the rifle to his shoulder and fired. One of the intervening riders pitched abruptly from the saddle, and his horse leaped away in fright. Joe worked the lever without haste.

"The kid!" a great cry rose. "That damn' kid's loose. Get him; get him!"

Campbell looked about and saw the boy kneeling in the dust of the street all alone, the rifle coming to his shoulder a second time. Campbell ducked instinctively, and saved his life. A man directly behind him cried out and clutched his saddle horn.

Campbell neckreined his horse and raced

for the kneeling boy. Joe again worked the lever without haste. The Colt .45 in the big man's hand spat flame as he came on—and easily the Winchester went once more to the boy's shoulder.

But the shot was not fired. A man on foot emerged from between two adjacent buildings, halted and carefully threw a shot point blank at the youngster's side. Joe flinched; the rifle wavered; then without glancing aside he raised it once more. Rather, he tried. Torn muscles refused to function; the rifle drooped and fell into the dust. And Campbell drew to a slithering halt before him.

"Damn all your breed, Kennedy!" he cursed. "By the seven devils, this is the last of it!"

He paid no heed to the nesters who broke from shelter and fired despairingly at him, fired with a prayer to guide their bullets safely past the boy so close to their target. His face contorted, Campbell raised the .45 so that the barrel lined on the breast of the white faced boy before him. The trigger finger compressed; the gun burst with flame; and young Joe Kennedy toppled over in the dusty street.

SAM STEDMAN had promised that his sheriff's star would remain on his breast to the end. As he snatched the rifle and crouched by the window of the little office he thought of that promise, and wished for once that he might retract his word. This bloodshed froze him with horror—yet his hand itched to thrust the rifle through the window and halt it by killing him who caused it. No fear held him, no reluctance to brave this withering hail of lead; but he knew that both sides would shoot him down the instant he appeared in the door. He was an outsider, one whose slightest move would be construed as treacherous interference.

Then the last cry of young Kennedy in the doorway brought Sam Stedman about; his voice gasped hoarsely as he called him. "Joe! *Joe!* For the love of God, come back!" He threw himself at the empty door.

The ungainly young nester in the office jumped at the same moment, and he crashed with the sheriff against the wall of the room. To his unbalanced judgment it had seemed that the sheriff was moving to arrest the boy's attack, and his anger made the gasping words tremble deep in his throat. "Don't you tech him, Sheriff! I'll kill you my own self. By God, I will—"

His right hand thrust the heavy barrel of a Sibley model Colt into Stedman's stomach. The sheriff froze, trying vainly to speak as the other's extended arm pressed against his throat. There was the light of madness in the young nester's eye. Stedman had the rifle in his hand, but he could not have used it in such close quarters even had he wished.

The sheriff attempted an ancient trick: he stared past the other's shoulder and grimaced in fear of what he pretended to see there. The nester did not rise to the bait; he was too wise in the tricks of fighting men to turn and look—but he was young enough to waver for an instant. That fractional second of indecision was his undoing. Stedman brought up one knee in a frightful blow. The youngster cried as though mortally stricken and collapsed in the sheriff's arms.

There was no time to feel pity; Sam flung the young nester from him to the floor, and darted outside. He saw the shot fired that knocked over Joe Kennedy as a nine-pin falls.

Sam's action was reflex. Standing on the plank sidewalk a dozen feet from the tragedy, he swung the rifle to his shoulder and fired. The .30-30 bullet, aimed in such snapshot fashion, merely broke Campbell's right shoulder. The big cattleman screamed an oath and took his pistol in his left hand and fired at Stedman. But the sheriff had swung a fresh shell into the chamber, and the bullet this time struck Campbell high on the forehead, very nearly taking the top of his head off. He stiffened, swayed, and went out of the saddle backward into the road.

Instantly Sam was the center of fire from every gun at this end of the street. Swinging about as he worked the lever, he shot down the man on foot who had first hit young Joe. He emptied the Winchester at the others who rushed on him, threw it aside and jerked out his Colt. Then a bullet struck his left leg and the member collapsed under him. He sprawled on the sidewalk, cursing.

The Campbell men were not the only ones to rush heedlessly into the street. A sortie, begun by a party of nesters who ran through the rear yards to the alleys

between the houses near the little office, came to a brilliant conclusion as they opened fire from this unexpected quarter so close at hand. Those still below, encouraged by the effects of this sally, and by the example of the two who had fallen up there alone, charged out and raced headlong for the spot, jacking cartridges into their guns as they ran.

"Get 'em!" they shouted. "Get 'em! They're runnin'—the yaller dogs! Don't let 'em get away!"

The Campbell men were fighting men by choice, men who scorned their ungainly adversaries, whom they called "farmers." But their very coolness, the greatest asset of a gunman, proved their undoing now. Colin Campbell was dead, and it was doubtful that their further loyalty would be rewarded. They had only their own skins to save—and precious little time to do that. A few, carried away by the heat of battle, stood their ground, undismayed by their leader's death or by the flanking attack; and these were swiftly killed. The others sized up the situation very quickly, and in a flash the field became a rout. They rushed to the horses, all of whom were squealing and kicking in terror, some of whom were shot; and risking death dealing kicks, pulled out their mounts and galloped away out of town. They were not exactly afraid—but they were very wise.

All this took but a few seconds. Before the main party from below had reached that dwindling line of horses most of those who were able to flee had gone. The others were granted scant mercy. Those little ranchers remembered too vividly the fall of young Joe. A few of them caught mounts and without hesitation set out at a gallop in pursuit of the fleeing men. Others burst into the Lucky Lode, darted into alleys, scoured about that end of the town to wipe out the last remnant of the Campbell force. It was not a pretty scene.

Sam Stedman had lost his gun as he went down, and his effort to crawl to where it lay on the planks brought such excruciating pain that he was forced to stop. For a few seconds he was in the grip of a nausea that blotted out all other sensations. This was fortunate indeed, for he looked much like a dying man as he sprawled there, and the desperate force about him had no time for any but those who stood on their feet.

When Sam gritted his teeth and attempted again to edge toward the revolver, the battle was already over. He was aware of what seemed a throng about him, and they were the ungainly, grim men of the nester clan. Almost stupidly he watched the Campbell punchers flinging themselves on their horses in flight. It was incredible that the end should come so suddenly.

Then he turned as he remembered young Joe. A bearded man knelt beside the boy in the road, lifting his head and shoulders to one knee. The youngster was pale as death, and his eyes showed a glassy white —but he was alive.

"Joe!" cried Stedman. Rather, he tried to cry out. The hoarse whisper he uttered astonished him. Heedless he went on, "Joe—they didn't get you! They didn't get you!" He felt strangely weak of spirit, so that his half hysterical desire to weep and shout at once gave him further cause for wonder. He shut his mouth and shook his head, striving to gain control of the emotions that ran amuck in his rebellious body.

Someone dropped on one knee beside him. "Sheriff, man—how are you? You hit bad?" A strong hand went about his shoulder, supporting him.

Sam clenched his fists so that the nails dug into the flesh. "No," he said. "I'm all right. Got a knee smashed. Never mind me—get young Joe into my office and on the couch, and get hold of Doc Saunders. I'll hold up somebody to drag me in later."

"They're doin' that," the nester said. He looked up and addressed a second man. "Hey, Munroe—come give the sheriff a lift!" The other hastened to them, and as gently as their rough hands could devise, they lifted the officer and carried him to his office. There they laid him on the desk. They were immediately followed by the group that bore the still form of young Kennedy to the couch. And on their heels came Doc Saunders.

MUCH of what followed was a nightmare to Sam Stedman. The rough nesters brought him whisky and fed him huge draughts of it while the physician attended to the boy. His senses became confused with the alcohol and the pain, and what he knew was the sickish sweet odor of chloroform in the room.

Faces, voices all dimmed and swam before him. It became much too complicated to keep track of them. He ceased to try, and drifted into a nebulous vague state where nothing mattered and his racked body floated blissfully on and on.

Then there was bright light in the little office, a dazzling sun of a light. Stedman found it necessary to reason the matter out. He tried to sit up, and found it not easy. But his eyes opened, and he saw that the light was the oil lamp that hung from the ceiling. Also, he saw faces that were strange. Yet they ceased to be so when he perceived the quiet form on the couch beside him. Young Joe! The boy was sleeping, scarcely breathing; but still alive and sleeping!

Next he observed that he rested on an iron framed bed that had been erected in the office. He was trying to figure out where it came from when a cool hand touched his forehead and applied a pressure that was oddly gentle and soothing. He looked up. It was Aileen Kennedy, and she regarded him with a tender, pitying smile.

"Sam," she said, "I knew you would play the man."

He looked at her vaguely. "Me?" Then he remembered. He smiled wanly, wistfully. "I played the man, maybe—Aileen—" he had never used her name before; however, she had used his. "But I didn't act—the sheriff." He fumbled at his shirt front. "My star is gone," he said.

"No. It's not." The girl reached out her other hand and the metal of the badge gleamed in the light. "I'm holding it for you."

He watched her, weakness creeping over his body again. He thought of his leg, which felt stiff and numbly aching. "What's Doc Saunders done to me?" he asked.

"He set your leg and sewed it all up. The bone was broken, but it was a glancing blow and a clean break. Tomorrow you'll ride out to our place with Joe on a load of hay, and you'll stay there till you're able to fight again," said Aileen.

The prospect seemed more pleasant than he imagined it could. Sam wanted tenderness and gentleness very badly now, after all the grim suspense and cruelty of these past months. He continued to gaze at her soft smile. "How's Joe?" he asked next.

The boy's eyelids fluttered as he heard his name and rose from the depths of weakness. His voice whispered, "Sam?"

"Yes, kid?"

"We got him, Sam, didn't we?"

"We sure did, Joe. It's all over."

"All over." For a space the boy was quiet, and as they watched it seemed he slumbered again. But no, whispering he asked, "Sam. Is all that peace and all you was talkin' about comin' now?"

"I think so, boy—if you'll help me make it come."

"You an' me, Sam," the boy said softly, "you an' me—we can do anything."

And he slept again, soundly, so that he heard no more. He did not need to; he was content.

On the iron bed Sam Stedman groped for the cool hand, and finding it, clung to it. An odd sound came to him, and he looked up. Aileen was weeping. "Miss Kennedy," he protested in alarm, "it's all right. Don't take it so."

The girl sat on the edge of the iron cot. "Oh, Sam Stedman, I'm not. I'm crying with happiness." Her hand pressed his.

Well, women were that way, Sam understood. As he watched her his eyes slowly closed, yet clearly he retained the image of her face, paradoxically smiling and crying at once. He wanted to look at that face, even with his eyes closed. It was tender and fine. He wanted to look on it a long, long time . . .

Sam Stedman slept then, too, quietly and restfully. On his lips was the shadow of a smile.

And the girl dried her tears and sat with her hand in his for most of that long, still and peaceful night—a night that lay over the little town of Krag like a benediction.

# Whippoorwill House

## *A Legend of the Arizona Desert*

*By* ERNEST DOUGLAS

UP TO the time he first heard of Whippoorwill House, Professor Elden Claridge regarded his expedition into the Sierra de las Brujas as a dismal failure. He had discovered nothing and in the face of native opposition he no longer hoped to discover anything. Then one day they heard the plaintive call of a whippoorwill and Mark Starr told him of the ancient temple supposed to lie somewhere in those spectral hills. After that he pushed on and on, feverishly, until—

"Spooky looking, all right, and just the sort of region where the most fantastic superstitions flourish." This was the archaeologist's first impression when the distorted peaks of the sierra rose like dragon fangs out of the misty blue horizon. Subsequent events did not change his opinion.

"This guide of mine, now," he was musing as they plodded across the barren, waterless llano, "I strongly suspect that he has acquired lying along with his other civilized accomplishments. There can't be any cliff dwellings this far south. He's just leading me on a wild goose chase for the sake of a month's wages and food."

The alkaline dust rose in little puffs beneath the hoofs of their tired horses and the two dejected pack mules. Claridge's eyes smarted painfully. For the thousandth time he wiped his dark-green goggles, blinking the while against the cruel glare of the sun. Long experience in the far places of the earth had taught him how to endure desert travel with a minimum of discomfort, but this trip out from Tucson was quite the most trying journey that he could remember. No wonder, he reflected, that the Brujas remained practically unknown to white men.

Wonderingly he regarded the debonair figure that led their little procession. There was little of the Indian in Mark Starr; nothing save the swarthy brown face with the curiously bright eyes, and the utter indifference of the man to blistering, blazing heat. The broad pinto hat, the pink shirt with frilly arm-bands around lithe biceps, the chaparejos with flapping fringes and many silver conchos, the long-shanked spurs that jangled noisily—these were the regalia of a typical rodeo cowboy. Indeed, when Claridge first met him, Starr's occupation had been that of riding trained broncos and performing rope tricks for

the wide-eyed amazement of tourists.

"This is certainly a grim and dreary country," the scientist commented in words thickened by the dust that clogged his throat. "You say that some of your people still live here?"

"The poor fish haven't got sense enough to move out," replied Starr. "You can't teach 'em anything. No brains. I've been back twice to tell 'em what they're missing, but they just sat and grunted at me. Said the spirits of the Ho-Ho-Kum would be angry if they moved away."

"Spirits? Why, I supposed that missionaries had converted all the Papagos."

"Some of 'em, maybe; but if this Santa Maria bunch are Christians I'm the Prince of Wales. You'd be surprised if I told you about some of the crazy moonshine they believe in."

"The Ho-Ho-Ho—" Claridge floundered.

"Ho-Ho-Kum, you mean?"

"Yes. Who are they?"

"That's what the Indians call the folks who used to live in the caves we're going to see. Nobody knows who they were or where they went from here, but my people think their ghosts still hang around."

"So we're going to explore haunted caverns? That ought to be interesting."

"But of course I know all that spirit talk is the bunk," Starr hastened to declare. "I'm educated. My mother tried to hide me when the agent came hunting for Papago kids to take away to school, but he accidentally caught me. I'm sure glad he did."

"Anyway, I hope that we meet some of your people."

"I don't. They might try to interfere and keep us out of the cliff houses. Our safest bet is to slip in, get what relics you want, and leave before they ever find out we're around. We can do it easily at this season, when all except the very old ones and a few children will be roaming around the mesas gathering saguaro fruit."

Claridge dropped back with the third member of the party, old Pablo Costello, whom he had brought along as cook and general servant. "*Mucho calor!*" he panted.

A sympathetic grin wrinkled the Mexican's pockmarked features. He continued imperturbably to puff a cigarette in the shade of his huge palm-leaf hat. A battered crutch, looped over the saddle horn, flapped against his one good leg.

They left the sterile flat behind as the mountain talus came down to meet them. The stunted alkali weeds gave way to yellow-green greasewood, to white chollas and to thorny prickly-pear plants crouching like waiting cats close against the level floor of the desert. Then appeared the lordly saguaro cacti, the giants, towering twenty to forty feet into the air and bearing on their lofty crowns diadems of scarlet fruit.

The mountains drew nearer, took on definite shapes. Starr bore toward a cañon, the mouth of which was choked with trees. They were not far from the spring where they would make camp, he said. And Claridge, moistening his lips with the last of the tepid water in his canteen, breathed a sigh of thankfulness.

They fought their way through a tangle of paloverdes and cat-claws until the reddish walls of the gorge loomed high on either side. For a few brief moments they were in shade, then the pitiless sun beat down again through a notch in the cañon wall.

Starr turned and frowned at the lagging animals; they betrayed no sign of awakened interest. "They ought to smell it by this time," he muttered.

WHY they did not smell it was soon apparent. In the bottom of the cañon was a fringe of dead reeds outlining a shallow hole that was now as dry as the *tinajas* on the mesa they had just crossed. At a glance Claridge saw that the pond had been fed through a fracture in the solid rock at the upper end. There was not a chance to find water by digging.

Starr's face, usually so complacent and assured, showed deep concern.

"There has been a long drouth here," he said. "This spring never failed before. We'll have to go to the village now."

"Are there no other springs?"

"None, except in wet years. The only other water on this side of the range is in the well at Santa Maria. But I didn't want the Papagos to know about us being here."

"I'd much rather proceed openly than to try to sneak into their sacred places behind their backs. Let's go."

It was five miles or so to Santa Maria, southward through the foothills of the sierra. The sun dropped behind the high

mountains and evening shadows brought coolness as well as some relief from the thirst that was beginning to torment them.

"What a ghastly joke it will be," Claridge ruminated, "if the well has gone dry and the Indians have moved away."

He was reassured when they topped a rise and saw points of fire glimmering through the purple dusk. They dropped down and threaded their way through a forest of mesquites where sweet white beans lay thick upon the ground. Here was unlimited feed for their stock; water was ahead; all would yet be well.

The trees thinned and they emerged upon a dusty plain in the middle of which straggled a score of domed huts and several long sheds. A pack of yelping dogs heralded their approach. Horses and mules broke and ran, to bury their parched noses in a trough made from the hollowed trunk of a cottonwood. A rusty pulley screeched as Starr dropped a bucket down, down, down into an uncurbed well. He drew it up swiftly and handed it to Claridge, who drank without ceremony before passing it on to Pablo.

Through the twilight strode a gaunt, straight figure, unclothed save for a short skirt of beaded buckskin tied about the waist with a thong. He was leaner and taller than any Papago Claridge had ever known. Hair that was almost white fell thick upon bronzed shoulders. At his heels were several solemn, absolutely naked children of both sexes, and half a dozen fat, wrinkled squaws in ample calico dresses.

"Good evening, Uncle Tito," said Starr, speaking in Spanish for the white man's benefit.

"Why do you come here, Marco Estrella?" challenged the old Indian, using the same tongue. "You are no longer one of us."

There was a long moment of silence. "Marco Estrella?" Claridge wondered. "Why, that's Spanish for Mark Starr. He has Anglicized even his name in the process of getting an education."

Starr laughed somewhat nervously. "This is my employer, Señor Claridge," he announced. "He is not sent by the Great White Father but comes only to see this land which so few of his people have ever visited. We will be here only a few days."

"And I shall pay you for water and for permission to feed our horses on your mesquite beans," Claridge interposed.

"You have told him of the caves and of the treasures left by the Ho-Ho-Kum," Tito said to his nephew. It was a statement, not a question.

"He has told me of certain caverns where people lived long ago," Claridge hastened to admit. "I desire very much to see them, but I promise you we shall disturb nothing."

"The promise of a gringo! What is that? Ask the desert people of the other *rancherias*. We of Santa Maria are wiser than they. We know that when we begin to mingle with the *blancos* we shall die off as our kinsmen are dying. So we live afar off here in a land so dry that no paleface wants it, and do what little trading we must with the Mexicans.

"You are not welcome here, señor. And this traitor—he knows what would happen if my young men were not away at the saguaro harvest. He has not forgotten what happened when he came back from the gringo schools that made him neither white man nor red, but filled his heart with lies. He has not forgotten our answer when he sneered at our gods that are also his gods, and proposed that we sell the treasures of the Ho-Ho-Kum for money."

"But we are here and we cannot start back across the desert tonight," Claridge pleaded. "Surely we may remain until morning."

"I cannot refuse you that."

The travelers filled their canteens and retreated into the mesquites, where they made camp. While one-legged Pablo hopped agilely about on his crutch, cooking supper, Claridge and Starr spread their beds.

"What are those treasures your uncle mentioned?" the scientist asked.

"Bunk. Nothing but some pottery and old baskets and junk like that. I wanted to gather 'em up and sell 'em for curios; but no, sir! These relatives of mine are a sweet-scented bunch of superstitious savages."

"They must have got hostile when you made that suggestion."

"Hostile is right! Put me on a horse and told me to beat it and not come back.

"Then, when I met you and found out how interested you were in cliff dwellings,

I thought I could take you around through the hills and show you these caves before the Papagos ever got wise. That water-hole going dry gummed up my plan."

"And do you think it is safe for us to remain here?"

"Oh, yes, until the others come back. This is the middle of the saguaro season so they'll be gone at least two weeks more."

"That will give me plenty of time. But I wish you had given me all the facts at the start."

A tom-tom began to boom hollowly and a high-pitched chant arose from the village.

"That's my precious uncle now," snorted Starr. "He's the medicine man here, you know. Pounding on his old deer-hide drum and asking the spirits to please tell him why the Ho-Ho-Kum stay so long in heaven. Sweet-scented old heathen."

AFTER breakfast the next morning Claridge proposed to Starr that they have another talk with Tito and try to win his consent to proceed about their business of inspecting the caves. He carried a bright red blanket with him as a present when they stepped over to the biggest hut, the one that Starr said was the medicine lodge. Before it was a broad circle of hard-beaten earth roofed over with leafy boughs. This was the *njúikot*, the dancing place where tribal ceremonies were held and the community life of Santa Maria centered.

Not a soul was in sight except one toothless squaw who sat under the shed, weaving a basket of some coarse grass. Starr asked her a question in Papago. She glared at him out of sunken eyes and from her shriveled lips poured shrill, abusive cries. Then she gathered her ragged skirts about her and withdrew into one of the shacks.

"What did she say?" Claridge wanted to know.

Starr stared angrily after the hag. "Everybody seems to be gone," he mumbled. "I don't know where."

"They'll probably be back soon. Let's look around."

Scarcely had they begun their sightseeing stroll when someone appeared at the crest of the high, black, rocky ridge that lay between the village and the nearest mountain. It was Tito, and as he marched down the slope he was followed by a queue of squaws and children. The morning sun beat warmly upon his tawny skin. In his vigorous stride there was something that betokened confidence and triumph.

Claridge and Starr waited at the edge of the dancing place. Apparently the medicine man was looking straight past and through them. He tried to ignore them but the Yankee bade him a pleasant *"Buenas dias,"* stepped in his path and held out the blanket.

Tito accepted the gift but cast it disdainfully to one of the women.

"We come as friends," Claridge began. "We mean no harm to your people nor to your gods. All that we desire is your consent for us to look at the homes of the Ho-Ho-Kum, those who have gone away."

"Look. Go on and look."

"We have your permission to visit the caves? You will go with us?"

"I will not go with you. Go on and look. I know what you seek, and you shall not find it."

"I thank you. We go. *Adiós.*"

Starr confessed that he could not fathom Tito's enigmatic prediction. The mystery soon vanished, however, after they had crossed the ridge and followed a cañon perhaps two miles straight in toward the heart of the hills. Here the guide pointed out a cunningly built rock wall on a projecting ledge well above them.

They climbed up a narrow trail and passed through a low doorway into a fairly large room. It was dark in there, so Claridge played the thin beam of his electric torch upon the irregular stone walls.

"Hullo!" ejaculated Starr. "Everything's gone."

"What's gone?"

"The baskets and the pottery and the other relics. This is the largest cave and most of the sacred rubbish was kept in here, stuck around on these shelves and boulders."

"I know now what your uncle meant. He came here last night and hid all those artifacts."

"Of course! Ain't that a devil of a trick? The sweet-scented old coyote!"

"And he has hidden them so well that he's pretty sure we'll never find them. I can't learn much about the people who used to live here unless I can see what sort of tools and utensils they used."

"The superstitious old fool! I'll wring

his neck for him," blustered the guide.

"No, Mark; nothing is to be gained through force. Perhaps we can yet talk him into being more reasonable, but somehow I have a feeling that we never will. What was here besides baskets and pottery?"

"Oh, a couple of mummies that they dug up. And birds carved of stone—onyx, I think."

Images of birds! Why, nothing of the kind had ever been reported from any of the Southwestern cliff dwellings. Mummies, too.

Claridge was sick at heart. He felt himself to be right on the verge of great discoveries but thwarted by the fanaticism of a pagan sorcerer.

They went up the cañon and spent most of the day prowling about rock-houses, most of which were in an advanced state of decay. Aside from pottery fragments they found no traces of relics. Tito and his helpers had done their work well.

Claridge had intended to call on the medicine man that evening, but he changed his mind. Much as he longed to examine those artifacts, his reason told him that pleas or remonstrances or bribes would be equally useless. He told Starr that they would spend one more day in the cañon of the Ho-Ho-Kum, taking photographs and measurements, and then leave the Sierra de las Brujas. So in the morning they again left Pablo in charge of the camp and struck into the hills.

Great, fleecy clouds rolled in from the southwest shortly after noon, to race across the bright face of the sun. The summer rains were at hand. Now and then there were momentary splatters of huge, tepid drops. Frequently their eyes were blinded by lightning flashes, and echoes of a nearby thunderstorm reverberated among the crags.

The storm subsided and the sun came out hotter than before. Claridge decided to take one more picture and call his work done. As he was setting his camera a melodious call, distant but clear, fell upon his ears.

"Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

"What?" The white man was surprised. "Can that be a whippoorwill?"

Starr was oddly silent, listening intently.

Again came the musical cry:

"Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

"Why, I didn't know there were any whippoorwills in this part of the country."

"There are a few."

"And calling in the afternoon. That's strange, isn't it? I supposed the whippoorwill was pretty much of a nocturnal bird."

"I never heard one in daytime except here in the mountains. And I never actually saw one. They say that nobody ever sees one until he has been to Whippoorwill House."

"Whippoorwill House? What is that?"

STARR did not reply immediately. He seemed embarrassed and spent a long time wiping his brow with a green silk handkerchief.

"I am not sure that there really is such a place," he said finally. "That's why I never spoke of it before. But two or three times a year the medicine man and old men of Santa Maria go away secretly into the hills. It is said that they go to Whippoorwill House to perform certain rites that appease the bird god of the Ho-Ho-Kum and bring the rain."

"The bird god? Did the Ho-Ho-Kum worship the whippoorwill?"

"I think so. All those onyx birds that used to be in the caves looked something like bull bats, which are first cousins to whippoorwills."

"And this house—it must be some sort of a prehistoric temple. Where is it?"

"I told you, Professor, that I've never been there. That's a secret that only the very old and the very orthodox are let in on. I don't know a thing about its location except that it's supposed to lie behind a 'tipping stone,' whatever that is."

"Let's hunt for it. Let's find it." Claridge was afire with renewed scientific zeal.

"We can try, but it won't be easy. Too late to do much today, though."

"That's right, it's almost night. But tomorrow we'll return and explore some of the other cañons."

It was almost sunset when they topped the high ridge above Santa Maria. A miniature cloudburst was raging its little best off to their left.

Suddenly a tongue of reddish flame darted down from the clouds and laid its tip upon a detached needle of rock, which

split into a million pieces. The air was rent by a deafening crash. Claridge felt the earth tremble beneath their feet.

As the watchers started down the hillside a procession moved out from the village. It was Tito again, with his retinue of women and children behind him.

"Wait," said Starr with a short laugh. "Here's where we'll see something funny."

"What are they going to do?"

"To dig for arrow heads."

"Well, what of that?"

"They're going to dig over there where the lightning struck. The Papagos think that lightning makes the flint arrow heads that are scattered all over the country from here to the Gila River."

"Why, the Ho-Ho-Kum made them."

"I know that. I'm educated and don't swallow any medicine nonsense. But just try to make these nuts believe it. Whenever they see the lightning strike they go there and dig."

"All right, we'll watch them."

Claridge and his guide reached the shattered shaft of basalt ahead of the Indians and sat down to wait. The thunderbolt had left a jagged furrow in the damp, brown earth.

The Papagos paid no attention to the onlookers. Tito seated himself upon a boulder and grunted orders to two of the squaws, who set to work with a shovel and a pick to clear away the loose soil. Starr watched them with a derisive smile.

One of the squaws picked something out of the gravel and handed it to the medicine man. He examined it closely, wiped it off with a rag, and dropped it into a buckskin pouch.

"Now what could that be?" Claridge speculated.

Starr did not reply. The smile had left his face. There was something of incredulity and also of terror in his aspect.

The squaws were on their hands and knees now, fishing small objects out of the debris. Others came to help them.

Claridge could restrain his curiosity no longer. He walked over to Tito, trailed by Starr.

"What are you finding, my friend?" the white man asked.

Tito held out a handful of white arrow heads.

"Well, if that isn't the strangest coincidence!" Claridge exclaimed in English, turning to Starr. "They think that lightning makes arrow heads; they dig in the exact spot where it struck and run into a cache left by the Ho-Ho-Kum. It's accidents like this that keep superstititions alive."

Starr had no comment to make. He was restless and fidgety, plainly anxious to get away. Still marveling, the scientist followed him down to the camp.

All through the evening meal Starr appeared to be in a brown study. He scarcely heard when Claridge or Pablo spoke to him. Leaving his food almost untasted, he went off to bed.

At breakfast the guide was still abstracted.

"Are you sick, Mark?" Claridge inquired.

"No, I'm all right."

"You're upset about something. It's that odd occurrence of the arrow heads. That was queer enough to impress anybody. Still, when you come to think of it, it wasn't such an impossible coincidence. There must be thousands of Ho-Ho-Kum arrow heads buried around here.

"Well, do you think we'll find Whippoorwill House today? Let's go."

An hour's brisk tramping brought them to the approximate spot from which they had heard the whippoorwill call the day before. "Now which way?" asked Claridge.

"One way is as good as another. The temple may be anywhere, or nowhere."

"That's true, of course. I think our bird was somewhere back of that red knob. Let's try that."

Starr's heart was most certainly not in the search. He volunteered no suggestion as to direction or method, and throughout the long, hot day followed his employer with ill-concealed reluctance. They climbed to the very top of one of the highest peaks and there caught a glimpse of the Gulf of Mexico in the hazy distance. They investigated caves, scanned far-off cliffs through binoculars, fought their way through thickets of thorny shrubs and prickly pear cacti—all to no avail. Not even a whippoorwill cry came floating through the still air to spur them on.

"Well, we may as well be getting along toward camp," Claridge said wearily, late in the afternoon. Then he looked about him, puzzled and momentarily alarmed by

a sudden realization. His bump of location was never good and they had twisted and circled and reversed themselves until he was completely lost.

Starr took the lead and just at dark they entered the familiar cañon of the cliff dwellings.

"WE'LL give it one more whirl," Claridge decided the next morning. "If we don't find it today we'll give it up, at least until I can come again with a regularly organized and equipped expedition."

The day was a repetition of the one before until noon, when they sat down on some boulders under a high cliff of bluish-green stone streaked with red-brown rust where water had trickled down from above. Here they ate their scant lunch and rested for half an hour before Claridge took another pull at his canteen and suggested that they move on.

"Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

The sweet, bell-like trill seemed to come from right over their heads. The human intruders into that mountain solitude peered about them inquiringly. Across the gorge was nothing but a bare hillside with not even a bush or a spear of grass to afford concealment to that mysterious trumpeter.

"Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

The cañon was filled with echoes. Claridge was sure that no one bird could produce such a volume of sound.

"Why, it seems to come right out of the cliff," he puzzled. "And it's perfectly smooth. Where can they be hiding?"

He ran about, tipping over boulders and looking under them, until one resisted his efforts.

Something about the appearance of the stone caught his attention. It was worn shiny on top, and on the near sides were some queer marks.

The better to see the other side, Claridge knelt on the boulder. It sank under his weight, at least six inches.

What had appeared to be merely a slab of slate or schist leaning against the base of the cliff swung slowly outward, revealing a dark tunnel with a pin-point of light at the farther end.

Several frightened birds swished through it, into the bright sunshine and were gone.

"The tipping stone!" whooped Claridge. "Didn't you say that Whippoorwill House 'lies beyond a tipping stone'?"

Starr nodded. His face was set and gray. He seemed to be keeping a grip on himself only by a mighty effort.

"And we've found it almost by accident. What luck!"

Claridge left his perch and the slab rose into place. "We'll solve that problem," he said confidently as he lifted a smaller stone and laid it upon the large one where he had knelt.

Again the doorway stood open. Without waiting to see whether Starr was coming, Claridge dived into the aperture. His head bumped against the low roof so he dropped to his hands and knees. Ahead he heard the whirr of wings as startled whippoorwills retreated.

At last he stood erect in the open air, with Starr at his side. He drew a deep breath as his eyes took in the spectacle spread before them.

They were in an oval basin, perhaps a hundred yards in diameter the long way. It was inclosed by sheer, beetling, dark crags two or three hundred feet high.

Right in the center was the temple. It was not a large building but imposing in its stern simplicity. Broad steps led up to a square, box-like structure open at the front. Its three walls were of enormous blocks of the black volcanic rock so common in that region. The roof was a flat bed of earth laid over logs.

Scratched upon the steps was a sort of scroll representing birds in flight. Rude though the work was, the birds were recognizable as whippoorwills. And when he mounted the stairway Claridge saw that the "desert varnish" of the basalt blocks had been chipped away here and there until the same design stood forth in the lighter stone beneath.

Most of the space inside the temple proper was taken up by a flat stone altar. Upon this were bundles of eagle feathers, evidently deposited there at no distant date, and several little earthen pots filled with crystals and colored pebbles.

In the midst of these sacrificial objects was the life-size image of a whippoorwill carved in flawless blue turquoise.

Claridge caught up the image with a cry of delight. The workmanship was ex-

quisite, perfect. Intrinsically the thing must be worth thousands of dollars; scientifically its value was beyond calculcation.

Starr's hand shot out. He jerked the idol away violently and set it back upon the altar.

"You mustn't touch that," he panted. "It's the bird god."

"Why, Mark! I know it's what the Ho-Ho-Kum worshipped, and evidently the Papagos also hold it sacred; but it's only a piece of carved turquoise. You're educated, civilized. You know that there's only one God and that He wasn't made by man out of stone."

"Of course. I know that." Starr fell back, abashed.

"It's only natural, of course, that the beliefs instilled into you as a child should flare up occasionally and confuse your reason. Now if you must handle this bird again, please do it gently. It's fragile, and priceless."

"Are—are you going to take it away from here?"

"Certainly! It's priceless, I tell you, and will open up an entire new avenue of archaeological research. And since your uncle deliberately hid those artifacts and dared us to find them, I don't feel under any particular obligations to him."

"I suppose not." Starr spoke dully and his face was an ashen gray.

Claridge stripped off his shirt and tenderly wrapped the turquoise whippoorwill therein, forming a bundle that was clumsy enough but would protect the treasure in case he should fall. Starr crouched back against the wall, watching.

Suddenly the Indian emitted a scream of terror. He leaped up and something dropped at his feet. Claridge set his heel upon the blood-red body of a lizard perhaps six inches long. In its death throes the reptile squirmed until its face was uppermost. The head bore a ghastly resemblance to the misshapen features of some deformed infant.

"It bit me. Here on the hand. See."

Starr exhibited the punctures of needle-sharp teeth on the edge of his palm. He was trembling like an aspen in a wind.

"Nothing to get excited about, Mark. Just one of those lizards that prospectors call 'children of the earth.' A vile looking creature, but not poisonous. I suppose that because of its hideous appearance the Papagos have their superstition about it."

"It's an evil spirit that the gods send to punish those who offend them. And you have killed it. That means bad fortune for us both, perhaps death."

STARR wheeled and fled precipitately down the steps. Almost at the mouth of the tunnel he threw up both hands and fell backward.

Before Claridge could reach his side, Starr sat up with both hands pressed over his eyes. On the ground fluttered a whippoorwill, like a beheaded chicken. Claridge picked up the quivering form.

"Here's what knocked you over. A whippoorwill, frightened by your mad rush and probably blinded by the sunlight."

"Dead! Is it dead?"

"Dead as a dodo!"

"Give me that god bird. Give it to me. The turquoise bird."

Starr hurled himself toward the white man, who dodged and drew the light revolver that he always carried on his exploration trips. The Papago was unarmed.

"Stand back. You've lost your senses, Mark. Don't think that I won't shoot to protect this."

Although crazed by terror and remorse, Starr could see that Claridge meant what he said. He drew back slowly, then scuttled into the tunnel.

After him scrambled the archaeologist, smitten by the horrible fear that the Indian would close the gateway and leave him to die of hunger and thirst in that mountain prison. But the way to freedom remained open. Claridge himself pushed the weight from the key boulder and allowed the schist slab to rise into position.

Far up the cañon was Starr, running like a jackrabbit with a high, swinging lope. Claridge, remembering that he had no idea of how to find his way out of that tangled labyrinth of gorges and twisted hills, sprinted along in his wake.

"Mark! Mark! Wait."

Starr slackened his pace until Claridge was almost up with him, then raced ahead. Appalled at the possibility of being left alone to wander about until he perished or accidentally found his way to camp, Claridge ran and ran and ran with the one idea of keeping his guide in sight until he could recognize some landmark. Sweat

streamed from him at every pore and the world before his eyes was a hot mist containing no tangible object save that bobbing pinto sombrero. He wasted no breath in yelling questions or expostulations.

Hours later, it seemed to him, they came out upon the level mesa. He thought that they were north of Santa Maria, and was sure of it when Mark veered to the right.

The Papago seemed to have shaken off some of his abject fright. He no longer ran but hurried on at a fast trot. Not once did he look back.

Thunder rattled among the ravines and a blessed breeze fanned them. A cloud, thick and heavy, was drawn over the sun. Raindrops pattered down, slowly at first and then like drum fire from heaven.

"Mark, for God's sake, stop. Let's wait here until the storm's over."

Starr stopped under an ironwood tree and leaned against the knotty bole. Claridge sat upon a wood-rats' nest, breathing heavily. The cool rain, soaking through to his steaming skin, was very pleasant. He still clung to the sodden shirt that was swathed about the sacred bird image of the Ho-Ho-Kum.

Without the slightest warning a lightning bolt rent the ironwood's trunk squarely down the center and filled the air with the crash of a million battles. Claridge was hurled flat upon his face. His body felt as though pierced through and through by innumerable red-hot needles. Then everything was blotted out by fuzzy blackness.

He could not have lain unconscious for more than a few seconds. When he struggled to a sitting posture, four words were ringing in his ears:

"The gods have struck!"

Starr was bounding off through the rain, which now came down in sheets.

Claridge groped about him and blinked his aching eyes.

His shirt, with the turquoise whippoorwill, was gone.

For a moment he tried to follow, but his numbed legs refused to function. All that he could do was to sit and groan out his misery until tingling life returned to his tortured frame, until the rain ceased with one farewell splash and the sun shone through the lifting clouds.

Starr had vanished, of course. Realizing the hopelessness of attempting to trail him, for all tracks had been washed away, Claridge set out in the direction that he supposed Santa Maria to lie. A vivid double rainbow, and the silvery sheen of water on the desert, failed to relieve his depression of spirit. With triumph in his grasp, the prize had been snatched away under circumstances that he comprehended only vaguely.

He found the camp without difficulty. Pablo was spreading their bedding on bushes to dry, for their tiny canvas fly had been blown away and everything was soaked. Claridge was too stiff, sore and miserable to care. Pablo's curious questions he answered only in monosyllables. Yes, he and Mark Starr had been struck by lightning. They were not badly hurt. He did not know where Mark was nor whether he would be back that night.

Next morning the world looked a little less dismal. Starr was still missing and Claridge told Pablo of the discovery of Whippoorwill House.

"So I suppose that he must have believed pretty strongly in his tribal gods, after all," he concluded.

"I knew that all the time," the Mexican agreed, shaking his grizzled head wisely. "They are never really converted, these *indios*. And strange things happen here in the Sierra de las Brujas, eh, señor? You know what the name means? 'The Mountains of the Witches'."

"Somehow I can't blame him very much, even if he did turn traitor on me. He was in the grip of a primitive religious urge more powerful than his will. I still feel responsible for him and wish I knew what he's doing now. He must have gone to the temple to restore the whippoorwill to the altar, but I could never find that place again."

"Why don't you tell Tito about it?"

"That may be a good idea. We'll see."

Starr did not put in an appearance, so late in the afternoon Claridge went over to the *njúikot*. Tito was there, glum and unfriendly as usual. Without preamble the caller plunged into his story and urged that the medicine man go to Whippoorwill House at once. Mark might be prostrated by the after-effects of the thunderbolt, he argued. Or he could have met with some other accident. At any rate he was in

such an agitated state that he ought to be looked after.

TITO started up angrily when Claridge first mentioned having profaned the sacrosanct temple by his presence, and by carrying away its principal treasure. As the narrative progressed, however, he became calmer and even seemed grimly pleased about something. Once or twice he asked Claridge to repeat, for his Spanish was limited.

"Marco has heard the voice of the gods," he declared finally. "He is now purifying himself by praying before the altar. The evil work of the gringos has been undone. He will yet be saved."

"Yes, if we get to him in time. Let's start."

Tito did not reply to this. He threw open the lid of a large, oblong willow basket and drew forth a shawl of some fabric that appeared, from its color and texture, to be woven of whippoorwill feathers. This he laid reverently aside. Then he faced toward the mountains, squatted upon his haunches, and began to beat rhythmically upon a drum of rawhide drawn tight over a section of hollow tree trunk.

As the drum rumbled portentously, Tito sang. It was a wild, weird invocation to savage deities, all unintelligible to Claridge except for one part. Every minute or so the singer would pause and intone solemnly:

"Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

"The old lunatic!" Claridge fumed. "Wonder what good he thinks all that hocus-pocus will do."

Tito raised his head. Claridge followed his eyes and saw a human figure slowly descending the slope from the high ridge west of the village, with the crimson and golden glory of the setting sun at its back.

"Is it Marco? Is it Marco?"

As he spoke Claridge saw that it was indeed Mark Starr, treading humbly and with snail-like pace toward the home of his fathers.

Tito sang louder and faster, and in his singing there was a note of ineffable joy. The drum boomed more deeply.

Half-way down the hillside Starr stopped. Deliberately he removed his clothing, piece by piece. The broad cowboy hat, the silken shirt and neckerchief, the decorated leather belt, the blue trousers, the tan walking shoes, the embroidered socks, the underwear—all these were stripped from his slender but well muscled form and dropped upon a *tovoso* bush.

Starr scratched a match upon a stone and touched it to the resinous shrub. Naked and unadorned, and with arms folded over his chest, he stood and watched the flames consume his finery until only a heap of smoldering black ashes remained.

A few steps forward, then Starr dropped upon his hands and knees. Like a vassal approaching his potentate, he crawled toward the medicine lodge.

Claridge watched in breathless suspense, a queer tightening about his throat and a great understanding beginning to dawn in his heart.

At the edge of the dancing place Starr paused again and touched his head to the ground. Tito advanced and threw the shawl of feathers upon his shoulders, where it fell like a mantle.

The medicine man took his nephew's hand and helped him to arise. He pressed upon him the heavy drumstick.

Mark Starr took his place at the drum. As its deep roar resounded through the stillness of evening he sang:

"Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

Claridge stole away.

"Begin to pack," he told Pablo. "Tonight we start back. We go without Marco Estrella."

# Big Bill Takes the Case

## *A Tale of Yukon Justice*

*By* WALTER W. LIGGETT

"IT'S just plain damned robbery, boys," stormed Swift Water Charley Bates, "and we hadn't ought to let these skunks get away with old Joe Endicott's claim. They'd be strung up in short order if they tried anything like this in the old days—"

"You haint never goin' to see the old days back in the Yukon," querulously interrupted Jack Holland, the oldest sourdough in the crowded cabin. "We got jestice so long as we had miners' juries—now we got regular jedges and all we get is law, and the little fellow loses every time." There was a low growl of approval at his words.

"Vell, maybe ve all chip in and help hire lawyer faller for Yoe. Den maybe he fight dose fallers in court," suggested Pete Larsen, better known as The Lucky Swede. "By Yimminey, I chip in hunner dollar if dat help any."

"Taint no use, boys," interposed Joe Endicott, "I reckon the best—or the crookedest lawyer in the world wouldn't help me any. I signed the contract, all right. It's down in black and white. I reckon I was a damned fool but I trusted Alguire—he grub staked me right along—and I didn't read that there paper when he asked me to put my John Hancock on it. It was all mixed up anyhow; whereases, ifs and ands, buts; and I couldn't make no sense of it no how. Us fellers never needed no contracts; our word was enough in the old days."

"You're damned right it was, Joe," said Jack Holland and once more a low menacing growl went around the crowded cabin. They were all old sourdoughs, these trail tested comrades of the Forty Mile, and this legal device employed to defraud Joe Endicott was a challenge to all of them.

"Joe Endicott slaved away at that hole in the ground for four years," loudly declaimed George Barton. "We all said he was a fool—I think he was to trust a lawyer—but I'll be damned if I'm goin' to stand by and see him robbed this-a-way!"

"Suppose you tell us just exactly what happened," interposed Big Bill Chambers, who had just entered with several companions at his heels. "We was down at the El Dorado when we heard a miner's meeting was called and we haven't got the straight of it yet."

"Why, it's simple, Bill," explained Swift Water Charley. "You know Joe's quartz

mine. Well, Lawyer Alguire has been loaning him money—grub staking him really—and he got Joe to sign a contract. It seems this contract really was an option on the mine—the money Joe thought he was borrowing really was the option price.

"Well, Joe uncovered a rich vein a couple of months ago and this skunk of an Alguire hustles around and gets the Treadway Syndicate engineer to look it over, unbeknownst to Joe. Joe already refused two or three good offers. But now Alguire has closed with the Treadway people and he goes out today with the engineer and they served notice on Joe that it ain't his mine no more. We've been looking over Joe's copy of the contract and I guess Alguire's sure flimflammed him. We was just considering what to do."

"What can we do?" bitterly jeered Jack Holland. "We got law and order up here now and I reckon you know how these carpet bag jedges will decide. They're allus for the big corporations. And the Mounties'll take a hand if we should hang these two mangy malamutes—like we should."

"What do you think we should do about it, Bill?" asked Louis Endhold, for Big Bill could out-mush, out-work, out-fight and out-drink any man on the upper Yukon and there wasn't any old timer in the Northland who wouldn't take his bare word in preference to any chechahco's bond. His size, his strength, his coolness, courage and resourcefulness made him a natural leader among these Yukon pioneers.

"Yes, what's your say-so, Bill?" came from all parts of the cabin.

BIG BILL scowled as he combed the caked ice out of his walrus-like red mustache. He was a massive man, good natured usually, and played as roughly as a St. Bernard, but he also could be as savage as a wounded grizzly, and his outspoken contempt for lawyers was well known.

"What did they say when they closed the trap?" suddenly growled Big Bill.

"Trap! That's what it was— a trap," chorused several others.

"Yes, it was a trap, and I reckon I squealed some when it closed down," said Joe Endicott almost apologetically. "You know I ain't a squealer, boys, I've allus taken my medicine, but I've worked like a horse in that there mine; I sent my wife and daughter down to the States: I lived out there alone with my dogs; and I tell you, after twelve years up here, I was kinda counting on making enough to get outside, boys, and spend the rest of my life easy. The family was counting on it, too; my daughter was goin' to get married, and I was goin' to set the young fellow up in business—but I guess that's all off now." Unconsciously, tears had come into old Joe Endicott's eyes. He was close to sixty, for all his vigor, but now he had the bent, dejected appearance of an old, beaten man.

"What did they say?" interrupted Big Bill.

"Why, this Alguire said it wasn't his business to point out the loopholes in the contract—"

"Loopholes!" boomed Big Bill with a sudden raucous laugh. "Loopholes! You sure, Joe, he used that word?"

"That's what he said, Bill. He said a lot more that I didn't rightly understand, but when I said I didn't read the contract careful, he laughs and says that's my funeral and not his—"

"He said that, did he, the dirty skunk!" suddenly grated Big Bill. "Why somebody ought to kill that dirty buzzard." His sentence ended in a profane explosion, and abruptly he began to pull on his mittens. "Shorty," he called, "can I borrow your dog team?"

"Where you going, Bill?" asked a dozen men.

"Where're these two robbers now?" demanded Bill.

"They mushed up to the mine this morning and they was comin' back tonight, Bill," explained old Endicott.

"How's the trail?"

"Why, the trail's all right, Bill. I come down Dominion creek—good glare ice all the way."

"Have they got the contract with them?"

"Yes, they had it this morning."

"Now don't you go out there and start any rough stuff, Bill," cautioned Swift Water Charley. "God knows those two rats need killing, but you'd only swing for it, Bill, and it wouldn't help Joe any."

"How big is this mining engineer?"

"He's most as big as you are, Bill; and Alguire's no lightweight either."

"Don't you figure on holding up those fellows, either, Bill," pleaded Swift Water.

"They've got a big corporation behind them. They'd have you jailed for sure."

"You say Annie was planning to get married on the money you was figuring to sell the mine for?" demanded Bill, of Endicott, ignoring the others.

"Why, yes, Bill, but I'd forgot that you ever knew Annie."

"Well, I ain't forgot," explained Big Bill with a furious oath. "Why Annie Endicott nursed me—ten years ago—back in Dawson, when I had gangrene in my foot, the time I went through the ice and couldn't get a fire built in time. That girl saved my foot—she was only a kid then—and if you fellows think I'm going to see her robbed by a jack-leg lawyer and a damn crooked mining engineer you don't know Bill Chambers."

"Take it easy, Bill, take it easy," cautioned Swift Water Charley again, for the giant's face was red with rage and his eyes were glinting ominously.

"Take it easy—hell!" flared Big Bill. "I'm off and I don't want anyone following me. I'm playing a lone hand, boys, but before I'm through with 'em these two crooks'll learn something new about loopholes." Slamming the door so hard the cabin shook, he pulled the hood of his fur parka over his face and plunged against the whining gale toward the cabin where his pal Shorty Allison stabled his dogs.

"MUSH along, you pore brutes, mush along," Big Bill commanded for the hundredth time two hours later. But his voice sounded like a whisper in the whine of the gale and the crack of his whip never reached the ears of his huskies. The five lean malamutes, straining low in the trace lines as they clawed for foothold on the ice, did not accelerate their pace. They had come fifteen miles in the last two hours, in the teeth of a fifty mile wind, with the temperature sixty below zero and still dropping. Instinctively they sought to swerve from the bare, wind swept ice of the creek bed, to the shelter of the deep drifted snow along its banks. But Big Bill drove them remorselessly forward. Running behind the sled, one gloved hand holding the guide pole, the other mechanically rubbing his cheeks to prevent frost bite, the frost whitened hood of his fur parka lowered into the blast, he permitted no slackening of the pace, as they followed the creek that wound through the high-hilled valley.

It was close to midnight and the shadows in the valley were black as ink; but the full Arctic moon was riding high in a cloudless sky of clearest blue and the bare ice reflected the stars like burnished silver. The peaks of the towering mountains stood like ivory carvings in the golden radiance and overhead the northern lights, green, gold, and red, were caressing the shimmering mountain tops in great streamers of flame. A few clumps of stunted cedars emerged like tiny islands in the white immensity.

But Big Bill had no eyes for this awesome, breath-catching beauty. With lowered head he was scanning the trail as it unrolled behind his flying sled and he seemed to pound his huge, moose-hide moccasined feet with unnecessary force against the ice, as he clung to the guide-pole.

Suddenly, there was a crack like a pistol shot—he felt the ice give way beneath him—and with surprising agility, considering his bulk, he leaped sideways as the startled dogs jerked the lightened sled forward. But they stopped a moment later at his command, and picking himself up, Big Bill walked back and surveyed the ice.

It was an air hole—the most dreaded peril in Arctic travel. The swirling water had thinned the ice until only a thin covering remained. Already wheel-like circles of tiny cracks radiated from the spot where Big Bill's weight had weakened the thin, surface ice.

For perhaps a minute Big Bill stood in the moonlight reflectively scanning the air hole. Then he abruptly stooped and with his gloved hand scattered several handfuls of loose snow over the telltale cracks.

Seizing the guide pole of his sled, he pulled it back over the air hole until it appeared that his sled had crossed the spot. He, himself, was careful not to step close to where he had so nearly gone through the ice.

Then, as his eyes roamed the valley side ahead, he saw two tiny black dots, at least a mile away, bobbing along the silvery creek bed. For a moment the man stood tensed, quivering like a pointer dog, then his eyes hardened with hate and a malevolent grin creased his frost stiffened face.

"Mush!" he cried, to his shivering dogs and his whip lash cracked as he expertly wheeled his team and guided them into a clump of fir on the creek bank.

ONE of the men trotting behind the heavily laden sled that was coming down the ice obviously did not belong to the Northland. He was big, as big as Bill Chambers, rugged even, probably a devotee of the outdoor sports, but the cut of his fur parka, the evident newness of his muckalucks, the absence of fine lines about the eyes that only come from squinting over the dazzling Arctic snow glare, all marked him as a chechahco, or newcomer.

In some indefinable way the north had put its stamp on the other man, yet he too, seemed to belong indoors, to fit better in an office than in these rugged wilds. Dark, bearded, saturnine, he was fifty pounds lighter than his companion, yet there was a rapacious hardness about him, something wolf-like, just as the bovine bigness of the other man reminded one of a well fed bullock.

"He's a queer old codger, that Endicott," the portly man was saying, "and for a while I was wondering if we didn't crowd him too hard. He looked ripe enough for any mischief when he left. It might have been good policy to—"

"Oh, his bark's worse than his bite," the lawyer, Alguire, sneered. "You needn't worry about him, Stedman. These old prospectors are useful enough to find gold, but it's no good to them after they've found it. Probably the old stiff would drink himself to death if we gave him a cut in. He'll still have enough left for one good long distance drunk, as it is, and he don't know what else to do with money."

"You called him a desert rat a while ago," Stedman said. "That hardly sounds applicable—up here."

"Oh, he was a prospector down in Nevada before the Klondike rush," Alguire explained. "Most of those old desert rats came up here. I guess the big companies were squeezing them out down below about that time."

"Yes, there isn't much left there any more for the individual prospector. The big companies are doing the developing now."

"It will come to that here, too, pretty soon," Alguire predicted. "That's why I figure we are wise to get in on the ground floor. It's all right to stake these old birds and let them find the gold for you, but then you want to shake them. They've got queer notions. They're hard to deal with. They ain't business men. Why some of them—like this old Endicott—are positively romantic." He stained the snow with a spurt of tobacco juice as he finished his speech.

"All the same, I'll feel better when it's over and I'm back in the States promoting this deal."

"Don't you worry about him," sneered Alguire. "He's—"

"Frankly, I'm worrying about myself," said Stedman. "He may have friends up here and some of those miners around Forty Mile look like pretty tough customers."

"Don't worry, I tell you," Alguire rejoined, a touch of asperity in his voice. "We got law and order up here now—judges, police, and everything. If he or any of his friends get gay I'll see that they get a vacation—behind prison walls. At that we can offer the old fellow five hundred in addition to what I loaned him. He'll take it when he's had time to cool off."

"It shouldn't take long to cool off in this weather," laughed the mining engineer. "It's terribly cold."

"Yes, it must be fifty below," the other answered. "Too cold to travel by rights. But we'd better be in town near the judge in case he starts anything."

"You feel sure he can't make any real trouble?"

"Not a bit," the lawyer scornfully assured him. "I had this whole thing figured out when I drew that contract—and the old fool signed it without reading it."

"I suppose he trusted you," said the engineer.

"I suppose he did," Alguire said with a snarl. "What's that to me? You can't bank trust, can you? You're supposed to read contracts before you sign them. You know the law, don't you? 'Caveat Emptor'. In other words, watch your step. He ought to know that at his age." Again he spat contemptuously with an evil grin.

"I suppose it's all legal enough," said Stedman doubtfully, "but all the same I'd feel better if—"

He never finished that sentence. There

was a sharp crack; he felt the snow covered ice give way beneath him, and as the frightened dogs leaped ahead, his already numbed fingers slipped off the handle bars of the sled and he plunged waist deep into the icy water of the creek before he could support himself on the jagged, broken edges of the ice hole.

Springing to one side as he heard the warning ice crack, the more agile lawyer escaped going through the air hole, but he slipped as he leaped, and in arising both of his mittened hands were soaked in the small tidal wave that flooded the surface ice as the bulky mining man splashed into the water.

"Help! Quick, Alguire! Pull me out of this," the mining man commanded. Already he was shivering from the icy immersion.

CATCHING the dogs, the lawyer backed the sled to the edge of the air hole and after the mining man gripped the handle bars, the dogs, urged forward, speedily yanked him out of the water. But he hardly had risen to his feet before his legs were sheathed in ice.

"We've got to get a fire going pretty damned quick or your feet and legs will freeze solid," the lawyer warned.

The big man, standing with a silly smile, as though his dignity had suffered the only damage, turned at the real alarm in the other's voice.

"Why—" he began.

"Good God, man!" Alguire cut him off. "Get busy and collect some twigs. Those feet of yours will have to be amputated if we lose a minute." For a second he stood still, surveying the snow covered banks in search of a dead tree. Suddenly his eyes dropped to his own hands. Both mittens were coated with ice. He tried to bend his fingers—and failed. His face paled as he frantically tore at the wrist bands with his teeth.

Both hands were white as he bared them to the biting wind. For a moment he stood, dazed, too frightened for comprehension. Then he stooped to pick up his whip. It dropped from his nerveless grasp. He began violently beating his bare hands against the handle bars.

The big mining man stood looking on, a stupid smile still fixed on his face. He was wondering whether Alguire was trying to make him the victim of a practical joke.

"Get some wood, man!" Alguire screamed hoarsely, suddenly noting his companion's inactivity. "For Christ's sake get some wood while you can still walk. We're both dead men if we don't get a fire going in five minutes," the lawyer shrilled, his voice breaking hysterically. "Don't you understand, you damned fool!"

For an instant more the mining man stared at him blankly, unbelieving, and then sudden fright flared in his eyes, at the sight of the other's vehemence. He took two uncertain steps toward a clump of alder bushes on the bank.

"Some fir—get some fir—some dried fir twigs, you fool!" Alguire screamed. "My hands are frozen already. By God! This is what comes of taking the trail with a damned chechahco."

For ten paces or more the mining man tottered toward the bank. His feet were leaden, without feeling, his legs utterly numb, and he reeled like a drunkard at every step. Abruptly, without warning his knees gave way and he found himself sitting on the ice, without power to rise.

Alguire, standing by the sled, swinging his hands against the wooden frame until their white rigidity was stained with blood, shrieked an imprecation as he saw Stedman fall and came running to his side.

"Get up! Get up!" he commanded. "You've got to get up! My hands are stiff already. You've *got* to get that wood." The mining man did not answer—he did not even protest as Alguire kicked him. He aimlessly pawed on the ice, like some great overturned beetle trying to right itself, but he could not rise.

"My God! We're done for!" Alguire cried again. "We're done for, Stedman."

"WANT a fire, boys?"

The lawyer and the mining man whirled in astonishment at the words. In the clump of stunted fir by the creek bank, hardly fifty feet away, Big Bill Chambers stood facing them. Unperturbed, utterly calm, he seemed to ignore their desperate necessity.

"Thank God!" Alguire sobbed. Deserting his fallen comrade, he bolted toward the bank. Stedman struggled to his hands and knees and, like an infant learning to crawl, painfully followed.

There, in the little hollow in the thicket of fir and alders, they saw Big Bill's sled. Beside it, piled cunningly in Indian fashion, was a heap of dried twigs, small fir branches, and sizeable sticks of dead wood. But it was unlighted.

"Funny, ain't it?" drawled Big Bill, "but I just laid a fire before you came. Figured on making myself a pot of tea. Then I heard you go through the ice." His voice was too indifferent; his manner too undisturbed. The mining man vaguely wondered what would be next.

"Light it, Bill! Light it! Quick! For God's sake!" Alguire burst out. "I'll lose my hands and Stedman will be minus both feet in about two minutes."

Calmly, slowly, Big Bill drew off one mitten and thrust his bare left hand inside his parka. His mittened right hand had dropped, it seemed almost by accident, over the holster of his pistol. But he did not withdraw his left hand with the matches.

"What's the matter? Hurry, man!" Alguire implored. "Haven't you got any matches?"

"Sure, I've got matches, plenty of them," Big Bill drawled again. "And the wood's nicely piled, as you see, all ready for a blaze. But I haven't got any paper. Some of those twigs is pretty green. They mightn't catch fire without paper."

Even Alguire, almost hysterical with fear, could sense some ulterior motive behind Big Bill's forced nonchalance. "What do you mean?" he raved.

The mining man did not stir. His feet, his whole legs were numb now, but his brain seemed unusually active. He looked upon the scene almost impersonally, it seemed. He already felt he knew the sequel. Strangely enough, something like a smile twitched his features. After all, he was only acting as an agent for the syndicate.

"Start that fire," the lawyer stormed.

"I can't light it—not without paper," Big Bill grinned. He did not raise his voice, but there was no doubt now that his hand was purposely resting on his revolver.

"Are you trying to kill us?" Alguire screamed. "You don't need paper to light a fire—besides I haven't any."

Big Bill's mittened right hand suddenly tapped him on the chest. From inside his fur parka came the rustle of stiff paper.

"What's that?" demanded Bill. "Sounds like paper to me. That'll do fine." As he spoke he pulled out a match.

"It's the contract—our contract," Alguire yelled, turning toward Stedman.

"It's paper, ain't it?" interrupted Bill. "Pull it out and I'll get a fire going."

"I'll be damned if I do," Alguire shrieked, now, for the first time, comprehending Big Bill's purpose. "This is robbery—blackmail," he spluttered. "I'll be damned if I give you that contract."

A grim smile came over Big Bill's face. "You'll freeze if you don't, Mister Alguire," he promised. "I'm sorry, but I just can't light this here fire without paper. I tried twice already before you came," he added, with an infuriating grin, "an' besides, this here contract won't be much use to you if you freeze."

"Give him the contract," Stedman suddenly ordered. "We are freezing while you haggle."

"Take it then," the lawyer screamed. "Take it, damn you. It's in my inside pocket. My hands are frozen already—I can't get it."

"I'd ruther *he* took it," Big Bill said, pointing to the mining man. "Must to be legal, you know." He grinned again. "I don't want you to be claiming later that I robbed you. You fellows are doin' this of your own free will—you understand?"

Alguire cursed, but he bent over Stedman, and without a word the mining man plunged his hand inside his companion's parka and after a moment's fumbling pulled out the folded contract and started to hand it toward Big Bill.

"Better put it under the fire yourself," suggested Bill. "I want everything regular."

Without a second's hesitation, Stedman spread out the paper, crushed it in a loose ball, and thrust it under the dried twigs.

"Better light it yourself, too," said Bill. "I'd kinda like to be sure everything is legal." There was a sneer in his voice as he mouthed the words.

The lawyer sank in the snow, sobbing like a child, but the mining man, still crouched by in the pile of twigs, seized the match which Big Bill extended, struck it against the dry surface of a log, shielded the flickering pin point of a flame in his cupped hands for a second, then resolutely held the match against the edge of the

contract. There was a wisp of smoke, a crackle, and the next instant the twigs were blazing.

AN HOUR later Big Bill stood by his dog team. Alguire and Stedman were huddled close to the roaring fire. Their unharnessed dogs were burrowed in the snow, and their sled, unpacked, stood near at hand. Big Bill even had erected their tiny pup tent.

"I'm hitting the trail for Forty Mile," Big Bill briefly announced. "I've rubbed the frost out of you fellows and chopped enough wood to last you all night. I even cooked you a damned good meal, which I think was nice of me, after all the names Mister Alguire called me.

"You two fellows won't have no trouble making town tomorrow. It'll be warmer anyway," he added, cocking an experienced eye toward the sky, "and you won't have no trouble if you watch your step—and look out for air holes."

"Would you consider staying with us and driving our dog team to town?" asked Stedman. "Of course I'd pay you for—"

"There ain't enough money in the North to hire me to travel with you two skunks," Big Bill said evenly. "That's why I'm going now—so you won't scent up the trail ahead of me."

Stedman flushed and was silent.

"To hell with you and your airs," Alguire cried. "After all you're nothing but a blackmailer, a highway robber. Wait till we get to town."

"All right. You'll find me waiting," Big Bill jeered. "I know that carpet bag judge would have upheld that crooked contract of yours, but now you ain't got no contract. You'll have to tell your story to a jury, Mister Alguire. A jury of dirt miners like me, miners who know Old Joe Endicott, and know you, too—you dirty buzzard. I reckon you know what they'll do, considering all the circumstances."

"I'll see that you get sent over the road for robbery—robbery—do you hear me, you big thug!" shrilled the lawyer.

"Yes, I hear you," said Big Bill, never raising his slow drawl, "and the case will be murder, instead of robbery, if you go shooting off your dirty mouth to me."

"I believe you fixed that hole on purpose," Alguire snarled.

"Nope. I ain't as low as you, Mister Alguire," Big Bill retorted. "Maybe I knew it was there—in fact I'll admit I almost went through it myself. Usually when us mushers strike an air hole we cut a fir tree and put it on the trail as a warning. I'd have done that, ordinarily, but then I seen you two a coming down the creek and I remembered what you'd told old Joe Endicott up at the mine—that it wasn't your business to point out loopholes in the contract.

"Old Joe's a chechahco in law matters, I reckon; but you two are chechahcos on the trail; and figuring what you'd done to him I couldn't see where it was my business to mark air holes on the ice for you. I reckon this warning business ought to work two ways.

"Now go ahead and tell your story in court—and I'll tell mine—and Joe will tell his. See where you come out, Alguire."

"There'll be no stories told in court," Stedman suddenly interrupted. "And you might tell old Endicott that I'll hunt him up tomorrow and make him an offer on the property."

"You'd better make that the day after tomorrow," Big Bill grinned. "There's goin' to be one hi-yu skookum blow out in Forty Mile when I get back and I reckon old Joe's head won't be fit for business tomorrow."

"Mush!" he cried, seizing the guide pole of his sled. "Mush, you pore fish eaters!" His voice was vibrant and the whip cracked like a rifle shot as the eager malamutes strained low in the trace lines.

"Even my dogs are glad to get shut of you, Alguire," he called back. "Now I'm a-goin' straight to town and you can go straight to hell!"

And the discomfited lawyer and the mining expert heard a last mocking laugh as his fast gliding sled slewed around the bend in the creek and the high, deep drifted snow banks hid him from their view.

*A Complete Novelette*

## CHAPTER I

### GREEDY WATERS

ABOARD the *Æneas* three men of widely differing type loved Althea Stirling; and when the disaster occurred the thoughts of all three promptly flew to the girl, as did their animate bodies. Nasmyth, the able seaman, reached her first—because of his knowledge of the intricacies of a ship; but Pardoe was a close second, because he was quick-witted, apt in repartee, an instinctive thinker. Faraday was last; but on arrival he swept the others arrogantly aside and caught the girl in his arms. There was no time to lose: the *Æneas* was already poising for her sensational plunge into the Pacific deeps.

"Here!" said Nasmyth; "bear a hand!" The majority of the passengers were yelling terribly as they fought with the members of the crew who endeavored to keep them from rushing the boats on the forward deck. Miss Sterling had been remotely aft, pensively watching the frothing wake, endeavoring, perhaps, to read her future fate in the phosphorescent mystery of the straight white road that stretched to the narrowed, night-dimmed horizon. "Look alive!" He applied himself to the after tackle of a small dinghy resting in its chocks near at hand. Quick to understand, Pardoe similarly applied himself to the forward tackle; the small, light boat swung neatly outboard. It was meant to do so when handled expertly, but had Nasmyth not had the trick of it, it must almost certainly have descended to the distant sea-floors, as the *Æneas* did a moment or two later. With the running falls in his one hand, rove under a thwart, the sailor held the craft in position. He felt the stricken hull lurch sickly, and he had once before been washed from a sinking deck by the terrible, ultimate wave. He knew the signs.

"Pass her in!" he called: a cool, steady man, master of himself and the situation.

Faraday started protests. "There's no food, nothing!" he exclaimed.

"There's a chance of life!" said Pardoe, and took the girl from him, passing her as if she were a feather to the sailor; who caught her about the body and adroitly lowered her to his feet.

"Any more women?" he asked. If there were, none presented themselves. The well-deck between the bridge and the after-part was already afloat.

*A New Twist to the Desert Island Story—This Time There are Three Men and a Woman*

# As God Made Them

*By* FRANK H. SHAW

"Lower away!" bawled Faraday, accustomed to command. But Nasmyth knew him for a landsman, small fry in a maritime emergency. He treated the eminent financier with indifference, and, in the absence of an authoritative officer, acted on his own initiative.

"Come along!" he called to Pardoe, who, being a gentleman, saw no reason why he should save his own life at a time when others—women, probably—perished in the clamorous darkness.

"Women—children!" Pardoe answered vaguely. He knew by instinct that a decent man never went on living with women drowning within earshot. "I'll look!" he added, and started away. Faraday, who had gained the unsteady boat, thundered to the sailor to do as he was told; and a wave-crest licked over the gunwales. The dinghy was almost overturned, but by a trick of balance, Nasmyth saved it from disaster. He saw Pardoe dimly as he hesitated at the head of the ladder leading from the poop to the well-deck; and—remembering that this gentleman had spoken to him civilly, and had shown interest in his ordinary labors, deemed it a pity not to give him his chance. He took a swift hitch with the doubled boat falls about the thwart, sprang from dinghy to ship, and, a powerful man, caught Pardoe about the waist.

"Come on, sir!" he advised. "Your dying as well can't help those others." And not without protests and struggles, Pardoe permitted himself to be flung into the boat. As it was, it was nothing short of a miracle that the frail craft got clear in time to avoid the indraw caused by the plunging *Æneas*. The end came with terrifying suddenness—the ship was, she was not; and between the two a man might hardly draw a breath of amazement. As the sea was comparatively high, by reason of the strong breeze that was still blowing, it demanded all Nasmyth's resources to keep the half-filled dinghy steady and safe. She was nothing more than an unconsidered chip in a sounding vastness that was fraught with perils. The waves that carefree passengers had indifferently laughed at an hour before from the imagined security of the ship's deck now towered mountainously—reaching their noisy crests, so it seemed, to the very sky. The troughs were bottomless pits, fearsome in their stenchful mightiness. Had the boat been kept broadside on she must have been not only capsized

but spun in teetotum fashion until she dissolved into splinters. But Able Seaman Nasmyth had had some large experience of boats, both under pleasant conditions and otherwise; and with an oar thrust out astern, he contrived to head his new command into the eye of the wind and across the tumble of greedy waters.

HE REACHED down and tore a bailer from its cleat beneath a thwart; he crammed it into Faraday's hand.

"Bail!" he shouted vigorously; "bail, like hell!" Faraday had made himself and a fortune of several million pounds, which, a few days before, he had invited Miss Stirling to share; but all his purposefulness and all his millions had not taught him the trick of using a bailer efficiently. He made a poor showing; so much so that Nasmyth snorted disgustedly. And Pardoe, dilettante and polite, a man of satin-smooth hands and leisurely movements, who had nevertheless stroked his college boat to victory in the past, caught the copper scoop from the millionaire.

"Let me have a shot at it!" he suggested; and when Nasmyth grunted again it was with seeming satisfaction. The water went overboard neatly and swiftly in answer to the rise and fall of Pardoe's hands.

"We'd best look about—see if there are any more swimming," the sailor suggested.

"This boat won't hold any more," Faraday said in protest. "I'd give a hundred thousand pounds if it was ten times the size."

"Ten million wouldn't stretch it," countered Nasmyth, with a grim chuckle. "We're much about as God made us now; money doesn't count." But the millionaire was too wrapped up in his own immediate misery to trouble his colossal brain over this obvious fact. He knew resentment against a dimly outlined God that he, Alexander Faraday, should be required to suffer actual discomfort and actual fear of impending death. He'd paid top prices for his suite de luxe aboard the vanished *Æneas:* he'd been treated with almost sycophantic courtesy what time he was on passage; the lifting of a finger had meant immediate obedience to his lightest whim.

The line owning the lost ship had expressed satisfaction that the eminent man had elected to travel under their protection. It had guaranteed his comfort in all matters; and yet—here was he, at something after eleven o'clock on a wild Pacific night, at the very time when he ought to have been sitting down to an orderly supper with a bottle of good wine, practically fighting for life, with only a thin plank and an ordinary seaman's cleverness and resource between him and an unpleasant finish! There was something radically wrong somewhere, and he would make a point of inquiring into it as soon as opportunity offered. Meantime, the one gleam of satisfaction in the entire sorry business was the fact that Althea Stirling was saved—owing to Alexander Faraday's presence of mind. Miserable though he was, that idea bred a sensation of satisfaction within him.

She'd refused to promise to marry him—though only Heaven knew why!—a few days ago. She couldn't look for a better match if she hunted the wide world over; but for some astounding reason she had seen fit to rebuff her suitor. Now, however, a sense of gratitude would prompt her to reconsider her decision. Women were like that. They turned haughtily from proffered millions and sprang gladly to meet one to whom they were grateful. With millions and gratitude—

"Look out what you're doing with that damned thing, man!" he said sharply as the well-wielded bailer struck him a sharp blow under the chin.

"Get out of the road, then, and don't go cluttering everything up," retorted Pardoe, who, aboard the *Æneas*, had felt a miserable jealousy for a better equipped rival.

"You seem to forget who I am!" snapped Faraday, with as much dignity as was possible.

"Fellow castaway in an eighteen-foot dinghy!" answered Pardoe sweetly.

"The harder you bail, the safer we'll be," said Nasmyth, straddle-legged, plying his steering oar like one inspired. "You, sir, climb forward and see if you can make out any one swimming."

"How's any one to see anything in this blackness! You have my orders to save such as are in this boat; never mind about the rest," growled Faraday.

To the mind of Clement Nasmyth came a sudden realization of importance. He was master of the situation by virtue of his craftsmanship. He, who had been required

to touch his cap to these others, to "sir" and "ma'am" them, held their futures in the hollow of his hand.

"You'd better handle this job yourself, then," he said.

"There isn't another one aboard who could," Pardoe said. "You're in command here; and we're under your orders, Nasmyth. Say what you want done, and I'll do my best to obey, though I'm only a landsman."

"You're doing finely, sir. Keep at it!"

"I'll look if any one is swimming," said Althea suddenly; the first words she had spoken since the tragedy. "Even a woman can use her eyes and shout."

"You keep at the back here," Faraday ordered magnificently; "I'll go. I have good eyes; none better!" But, crouched in the bows, although he maintained a purposeful vigil, he sighted nothing beyond a floating grating and an empty provision box or two. Drenched and redrenched as he was, he discovered the night air chilly. Discovered, too, that he was hungry with a craving on his palate for rare wine. Never had he more desired the plop of a champagne cork or the soothing gurgle of the golden liquid into its native glass. Normally, he took champagne as a matter of course, appreciating its fineness and flavor; but now champagne in the abstract was tantalizing and eminently desirable. The beat of salt spindrift had parched him, he understood. Even a glass of port, even a cocktail, say, wouldn't come amiss. Even—a strange idea!—a glass of ice water!

"Where's the fresh water?" he called aft to Nasmyth. "I'm thirsty."

"'Doubt if there is any," responded the sailor. "This isn't one of the proper lifeboats. Might be a barrico there for'ard, if you look." There was no barrico. There was, indeed, practically nothing at all; but by reason of the need to continue the struggle for bare existence, the weight of this fact hardly impressed them. The future with its veiled possibilities counted for nothing; even less than nothing; it was the present hour that mattered. Faraday, realizing that to murmur against the lack of liquid provision might exaggerate and tantalize his thirst, continued his gazing into obscurity. Pardoe went on bailing; for the water dripped inboard with purposeful thoroughness; Nasmyth juggled with the steering oar, performing maritime miracles.

"Can't I do anything?" Althea Stirling asked. "Even a woman might be allowed to lend a hand." She was cleanly bred, a member of the ruling caste; not a girl to shiver away in hysterical panic. Her body might be drenched and comfortless, but her heart was high.

"Nothing I can see. If you could sleep a bit, now!" Nasmyth suggested; and for a man of his position his voice was strangely soft and gentle; almost as if he coaxed a weary child.

"No; I don't want to sleep while you're fighting. I know." She balanced herself in the unsteady craft, where the water within slushed and gurgled and the water without beat hammeringly; where the planks creaked and the steering oar thudded and squeaked, and commenced to sing. She had a very attractive voice; and had been much in request for the happy-go-lucky concert held aboard the lost *Æneas*. She sang "Abide with me," and she sang it with more concentrated feeling than she imagined herself capable of expressing.

The enormity of her surroundings reminded her of her tremulous loneliness. She had been an entity, a compelling personality aboard the ship: a magnet to attract attention. Even the other women had been drawn to her, notwithstanding her beauty and her charm. And if her social position formed part of the attraction, those other women were, perhaps, not to be blamed. At home Althea Stirling moved in prominent circles, figured in the news; her photograph was in request for the society journals. Her start on this voyage which threatened to end so disastrously had been widely paragraphed. She was proceeding to the radiant East for the purpose of writing a book that every one prophesied would be even more interesting and profitable than her sensational first novel: "A Soul's Windows." She was twenty-one years old, which was young for her success.

BUT here, in the swirling, restless boat that was a cork on an expanse of mightiness, she was oppressed by a sense of her own paltry insignificance. Aboard the *Æneas*, her womanhood had been an admirable thing: something to be proud of. It placed her definitely as a conqueror of human and masculine souls. Here she was an encumbrance. These men were struggling not only to preserve their own lives but also hers, and she was

unqualified to pull her own weight in the galley. The utmost labor within her power, so it appeared, was to sing, while her companions worked; so she sang with all her heart and soul. Though the wind mocked her, snatching the true notes from her lips, though the spindrift beat on her uplifted face, the men who listened felt new tinglings in their hearts; felt the germs of a new faith take root in their once careless souls.

"Thanks—that helps a lot," said Pardoe, bailing still, though silently, as if it were a sacrilege to add a single other sound to the elemental chorus.

"Fine!" boomed Faraday from the bows. "Hi!" He thought to see a shadow flit across his vision. "Hi! Look there!" He stabbed the night with an invisible forefinger, lifted his voice to a strident yell. "It's a boat, with a sail!" he exclaimed.

"One of the lifeboats, likely!" said Nasmyth. "Come on, then—all together—shout!" But they were to leeward of the boat, if it were indeed a boat and not a figment of the financier's imagination; and apparently their shouts did not carry. Though they cried out repeatedly there came no answering hail and the sense of loneliness and aloofness from the things of life appeared to increase.

Yet it is doubtful if any one of the four had fairly considered the imminence of death. To Nasmyth, bred to the way of the sea, death was so constant a shipmate as to be negligible. Pardoe was no coward. Men of his breed had led desperate forlorn hopes and won out to incredible victory. Faraday had sufficient faith in himself to count that self impervious to ordinary hurts. As for Althea Stirling, if she feared the end, there was no suggestion of a tremor in her voice when next she sang. This time she selected "Eternal Father;" and somehow, almost without their own volition, the men joined in. Thus, singing and working and fighting, they endured through the terrifying hours. Nasmyth's work-hardened palms grew blistered and raw from the unceasing work at the oar. In Pardoe's hands the bailer became gradually a torment; a Sisyphean stone that must everlastingly be fruitlessly rolled uphill; but he persisted, believing that on his own efforts, no less than on the sailor's, the existence of them all depended. His mouth, too, was parched, but he accepted the fact of there being no water, and made no futile demands.

Faraday, notwithstanding the discomfort of his position, crouched there in the bows, presently sank into a sodden slumber; for he was a man who had openly boasted that no crisis, financial, physical or psychical, had ever required him to depart from his regular habits. He worked like a slave, he rested like an animal, and occasionally his snores reached the ears of those who were awake.

"That's an example you might follow," Nasmyth suggested to Althea, where she crouched beside him. "Time'll pass quicker that way. Here!" He had been wearing a coat when the disaster occurred; and, thinking to hear the girl's teeth chatter, he divested himself skilfully of the garment and laid it about her meagerly clad and drenched body. "I wish I'd thought of that before," he mentioned.

"You need it yourself," Althea said.

"Not I, Miss," Nasmyth laughed. "I'm all of a lather as it is!" And, after exertion and exposure, Althea slept fitfully. Thus the sudden dawn, wakening the sky from its purple mystery to flushed and vivid reality, found them. On the wide sea the dinghy floated entirely alone.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MORNING

"I THINK I know how Adam felt after his first night on earth," said Pardoe with a laugh that morning. "Wonderful thing, daylight, isn't it?"

"This breeze is taking off," Nasmyth said. "They come up sharp and sudden in these waters; but they don't last long; that's one comfort. Once this sea eases, we'll be able to reckon things up a bit."

"I wonder what happened to the *Æneas?*" said Pardoe. "Everything was so sudden I hadn't time to think." The coming of daylight had aroused them to a consideration of matters beyond their own narrow environment. Daylight increased their courage, allowed them to see each other, minimized the enormously overwhelming loneliness of the sea. "Hadn't even time to dress properly; I was just turning in." He was in white evening trousers and a shirt that had once been hard-fronted. He wore dancing pumps and silk socks. He had

removed his tie but his collar was still in place. Nasmyth studied him; turned keen if somewhat bloodshot eyes to the figure of Miss Stirling, curled in the stern-sheets like a kitten. The sun, thrusting its upper limb above the horizon, glowed on the girl's uncovered hair and gave it a likeness to ripe corn. And then, somehow, the eyes of the two men met, and surprised an identical expression in each, of compassionate protectiveness quickened by something even deeper. And, as though answering one another's thoughts, both nodded. It was Pardoe who stretched out his hand.

"Whatever happens," he said simply, "she's to be thought of first, eh? *Whatever* happens!"

"Of course! She's a woman," grunted Nasmyth, and took the extending hand, to grip it firmly. "We're agreed on that, sir—*whatever* happens, eh?" And, by a common impulse, both pairs of eyes turned on the recumbent form of Alexander Faraday there in the bows: a huge shape, almost gigantic, indeed, even when relaxed, suggestive of intolerant strength. An ugly customer to arouse he looked, sprawled there: his mouth slightly open, his fists clenched. It was notorious that he had relentlessly broken many men, his opponents, showing no mercy, kicking aside all obstacles that impeded his impetuous onward career.

"Wonder if he'll try to break me?" Nasmyth muttered, and his cliff-like jaw set very squarely.

"Considering we're all in your hands, my friend, he'll be a fool if he tries anything of the sort," said Pardoe.

"How d'you mean—in my hands?"

Pardoe made a gesture, indicating the boat and its environment. Although slight it was explanatory. "You're the man we have to look to for everything now," he said. "We're helpless children, passengers who've always had everything done for them. You're the expert. Have you any idea what happened to the ship?"

"I was awake, certainly, sir, but it came suddenly. I fancy she must have hit a derelict that planed her bottom-plating clean away. It's happened before and it'll happen again. Some capsized schooner or something of the sort, wood built, loaded with timber, say, or empty casks: they'll float for ever until something cuts 'em in two. And they're so tough they'll crumple up chilled steel like wet paper, if they're hit hard enough." It was as good an explantion as they were likely to get, meanwhile all the explanations in the world would not alter the fact that these four were hopelessly cast away in a boat that was ludicrously small and insufficient.

"NASTY things, derelicts!" Pardoe commented. "I hope there wasn't much loss of life; inevitable, though, I'm afraid." And his manner expressed self scorn in the fact that he was still alive, though precariously, while others, and women among them, were conceivably dead.

"I expect so; but worrying over 'em won't help now. We've got to think of ourselves. And it's not a cheerful out-look."

"We're alive, though."

"Yes, sir, that's a fact; we're alive. And while we're living we can go on hoping. Anything might happen; a ship might sight us; we might get in touch with the other boats; they'll have food and water."

"That reminds me: I'd like a drink uncommonly just now; and bailing all night doesn't kill a man's appetite, I've found."

"There's neither food nor drink aboard, so far as I know," said Nasmyth calmly, and again their glances met. Pardoe's lips pursed into a whistle; but while fully recognizing the gravity of the situation, his face did not whiten beneath its salt-grimed tan. Indeed, he forced an encouraging laugh.

"If this had been a story we'd have provisioned and watered before abandoning ship," he said. "Being real life we neglected that precaution. It's a pity—a great pity."

"I did think of it, but there wasn't time; no stores aft."

"I might have found some while you were getting the boat adrift, if I'd thought for a minute. There was a bottle of whisky and a siphon in my cabin and a tin of biscuits. Better than nothing."

"Wait a bit, though—I've remembered something," said Nasmyth; and reached down toward Althea's indifferent form. For an instant Pardoe snarled. Fatigue had quickened his imagination; he had read gruesome stories of shipwrecked crews resorting to hideous practices in order to save life.

"If you try—" he began, then bit his lips. "I'm sorry," he said, as Nasmyth neatly searched the pockets of his own coat. So deftly did the sailor work that Althea still

slept on serenely. Out of an inner pocket Nasmyth triumphantly produced two hard ship's biscuits, with butter of a sort sandwiched between them.

"I'd just nipped below for them when I felt the ship hit something," he explained; "so I pocketed 'em and got on deck. I wish I'd bagged the whole bargeful!" Pardoe eyed the food lustfully. He was really hungry; but not so hungry as the sailor; for he had dined well at eight o'clock the previous night, while Nasmyth had contented himself with a forecastle supper of hash and biscuits at five.

"So far as I can see," Nasmyth said, weighing the biscuits on a raw palm, "that's all the food we've got among the four of us until we get more somehow. But it's the want of water that's worrying me—a man can stand hunger when he can't stand thirst. You don't go mad of hunger."

"We've got to keep ourselves sane, my friend." And again Pardoe's eyes turned toward Faraday. It was queer how these two formed a combination against the millionaire instinctively. Probably both had sensed something ruthless and elemental in the man's cosmos, and were secretly afraid of it.

"Yes, sir, we must try to do that," Nasmyth agreed, and tightened his belt. "It's when it begins to get hot we'll feel thirst most, with the air so full of salt as it is."

"You're a bit above the general run of sailormen, aren't you?" Pardoe asked, eying the sailor with mild, impersonal curiosity.

"Oh, sailormen aren't the ignorant, untutored tarry-breeks of the books," was the reply. "We've all been to school, more or less; and the sea's a fine educator. It teaches you to fend for yourself."

PARDOE thought it might be his imagination that caused him to suspect evasiveness in Nasmyth's reply; the sailor at once turned to a subject of more importance.

"We're pretty far away from land," he said, "so far as I know, land of any importance, that is. But when I took the watch-officer's coffee to the chartroom at five bells, I took a look at the chart, as a sailor always does out of curiosity. So far as I remember we were about abreast of some land of sorts—don't know anything about it; never heard the name before and can't remember it now—and it would be perhaps a couple of hundred sea-miles away. I can't say definitely. That's how it impressed me. Much about due south from where the ship went down: might be more, might be less. Two hundred miles is a long way to go in a boat without a sail, and with neither food nor water; the best thing we can do is to pray for a ship of sorts to sight us. You might take this oar a minute, sir. Keep her across the seas as well as you can." And as Pardoe unskilfully took the clumsy scull, differing vastly from the slim blades to which his youth had been accustomed, Nasmyth swung himself overboard. It seemed a surprising thing to do, and Pardoe feared spasmodic madness. He made a grab for the collar of Nasmyth's shirt, and the dinghy immediately swung her broadside to the play of the waves, almost capsizing. As the lives of three seemed to Pardoe of more importance than the life of one, he let the sailor go and applied himself with indifferent skill to the oar.

"It's all right!" Nasmyth hove himself cunningly aboard. "But keeping yourself wet outside helps your thirst. I've heard that and I've proved it before today. This isn't my first shipwreck. During the war . . . "

Pardoe had secured a comfortable staff billet during that period of international agony, and felt vaguely ashamed. If he'd only done as others had done and fared to Flanders fields, he would have learned a hardiness that might at this juncture have stood him in good stead. He was painfully aware of his own uselessness in this present predicament. His instinct was to help in some really worth-while way; but his hands were unaccustomed to knacky toil.

"I'm hardly dry yet myself," he said.

"Keep yourself wet; bail some of that water over yourself or drop overboard. It mightn't rain for God knows how long, though a breeze of this sort generally ends up in rain-squalls down here. That's what I'm counting on." Whether it was the lurching of the boat as Pardoe unskilfully went overside, or what: Faraday wakened with a snort, turning a hard and threatening face on Nasmyth.

"What're you trying to do?" he asked; "what's—where's—oh!" Recollection came back with a rush as he blinked in the sun's level rays. He immediately came aft,

awkwardly negotiating the thwarts, and seated himself protectingly beside Miss Stirling. "Well, what about everything?" he demanded commandingly. "Anything happened during the night?"

His manner irked Nasmyth, especially after what Pardoe had told him about his own superiority, allied with his own thoughts during the laborious hours. He realized that Faraday might prove a difficult proposition to handle; that he might indeed strike a recurring discordant note.

"There's been a good bit of work," he said coolly; "but you won't have noticed that. Nothing's happened, and what's likely to happen you can see for yourself. That's *my* coat Miss Stirling's got on." And he stared rather meaningly at Faraday's outer garment: a smoking jacket.

"Don't forget your place, my man," said the financier curtly. He was always bad-tempered before breakfast, for he was a man who needed much food to keep the machine, his body, going, by reason of the demands he made upon it.

HIS intolerant manner stung Nasmyth like a whiplash. "There's one thing I am not likely to forget," he said, "and that's that if it wasn't for me you wouldn't be here alive; and if it wasn't for me, you'd stand a mighty poor chance of getting anywhere else before you die of thirst and starvation."

"He's quite got the right of it there," added Pardoe, his head appearing over the gunwale from outboard. "If it hadn't been for his tip about going overboard I'd be thirstier than I am, but it's worked, Faraday." Nasmyth steadied the boat while Pardoe clambered inboard. Miss Stirling still slept on; and the morning was growing genially warm. In a while it promised, providing the wind decreased at its present rate, to be almost unbearably warm.

"Things look pretty hopeless," gloomed Faraday. "I'm sorry for Miss Stirling."

He spoke her name possessively.

"So are we all," said Pardoe, dripping water from every angle. "And since we can be perfectly frank, I expect we're all pretty sorry for ourselves, too. But being sorry won't help. The thing is, what's best to be done?" Instead of looking toward the financier, as Faraday expected, for he was accustomed to the deference of his kind, accustomed to rule their destinies in small matters as well as great, he looked toward Nasmyth.

"We've got to get out of this mess—got to—got to—er got to—hail a passing ship or make for the nearest land, or something," Faraday said vaguely. And Pardoe smiled.

"Nasmyth will know best," he said.

"Yes, of course; it's his job—his plain duty. That's what he's paid for," came Faraday's response. He was prepared to relegate minor duties to underlings on occasion; and the saving of the four lives seemed a minor task to him at the moment. It was some one else's affair, anyhow.

"So far as sea-law goes, my pay stopped when the ship went down," said Nasmyth. He was slowly realizing facts, trying to bring himself into a position to cope with them. "But I'm ready and willing to do my best."

"I shall see that you're amply rewarded, of course," said Faraday handsomely, "although your own life—that is, your interest must lie in saving your own life, and as we others are with you—"

"Money's not much use out here," said Nasmyth, with the ghost of a smile curling his lips. "And I was never particularly fond of it, either."

"Then if the promise of reward doesn't tempt you, we'll have to try the feat of punishment," said Faraday, and Nasmyth's smile deepened.

## CHAPTER III

### TWO BISCUITS

NASMYTH was still keeping the dinghy over the run of the seas, though with infinitely less difficulty now than before, for the combers were lessening, and the wind, once a gale, was now only a blusterous restlessness. He glanced at Faraday's clenching fists, noticed the active size of the man, noticed the dogged sternness of granite like face, still he smiled.

"If you beat my brains out with a stretcher, where'd you be?" he asked quietly. "Don't think I'm a man to tyrannize, though; I'm not. I want to save my own life; I want to save Miss Stirling's—" Pardoe looked at him quickly as he mentioned the girl's name. Much can be told by the tone of a voice. The dilettante, the

romantic, chivalrous lover, recognized the symptoms. Incredible though it might seem, the untutored sailor loved the girl.

"And if this goes on," Pardoe thought; "he probably stands the best chance because he commands the situation, and that girl will owe everything to him. I wish I was Able Seaman Nasmyth!"

"I want to help as much as I can," continued Nasmyth. "I'm not a braggart, But I do know that I've got something that none of you others have got, and that is experience. It means more here than any thing else. So you've got to do as I say! Money won't fetch us to land, money won't feed us; money won't give Miss Stirling a drink when she wakens thirsty." Again Pardoe looked at him thoughtfully as he mentioned the girl's name. To be sure, it was only natural that a man, a sailor, notoriously chivalrous, should put the woman's case in the forefront; but—

"You won't find me a very terrible captain," laughed Nasmyth, the dried salt on his face cracking. "So long as we all play fair, and let Miss Stirling have first chance at everything except danger."

"That's understood, of course," said Pardoe quietly.

"Of course," came from Faraday. "Well, what's to be done for a start?"

"Look things squarely in the face," the sailor said. "We're four people adrift. We've a boat, two oars, a bottom-board that I can cut into a rudder of sorts. There's no sail; but we might contrive one out of our shirts and whatnot, if the wind sets fairly from the north. We've two biscuits to eat, and not a drop of water to drink. I believe there's land, though I don't know of what description, about two hundred miles south of where we are. We might as well try to get in that direction. So what do you say if you two take the oars for a spell? I can steer with the bottom-board after a fashion. And as the sea's going down we might make some headway now."

"I've never pulled an oar in my life," said the man who used powerful motor-launches when business or inclination took him afloat. He was neither public school nor 'Varsity; his beginnings were obscure. He was essentially a self-made man who had applied all his powers since youth to amassing wealth and securing power.

"The best teacher's necessity," said Pardoe; "I'm one up on you there, Faraday: I know how to row." And for the first time since he had entered the lists against the financier, he tasted the sweets of superiority. It was a small victory, but to his way of thinking it made his case less hopeless than he had hitherto counted it. For hope springs eternal in the human breast, and to Pardoe it never occurred but that this astounding adventure must have a satisfactory ending of one sort or another. It was impossible to believe otherwise; sooner or later would come release from a difficult situation.

"It'll be the first job that I've tried where I've failed," said Faraday and to Pardoe's mind there was a slight thinning of his previous veneer; just a hint of the original brute beneath—as though his new environment had rid him of certain conventions.

FOR, in certain circumstances, the human race reverts to its origin with alarming swiftness. The restraints of civilization are but artificial bonds when all's said and done. Alexander Faraday's father had been a bricklayer and not a very good bricklayer at that; a man who customarily thrashed his wife every Saturday night for the betterment of her soul, and who liked nothing better than a really good fight with a companion, even if it ended, as frequently it did, in a police-cell and a fine the next day.

And, as Faraday stripped off his smoking jacket and rolled up his shirtsleeves to disclose monstrous, hairy arms, his father would have recognized the gesture. It was that of the working man commencing action. He applied himself to an oar and pulled unskilfully, catching crabs, wasting his enormous strength; outpulling Pardoe at the other oar. Nasmyth hesitated to secure the bottom-board, because it would have meant disturbing Miss Stirling, who still slept soddenly, and urged Faraday to conserve his strength more; but the financier resented tuition and pulled even more savagely. However, the exertion made him very thirsty, and the oar-loom blistered his unaccustomed hands, so by degrees his efforts lessened, and Pardoe, using his oar scientifically, was required to pull less smartly. Miss Stirling wakened during this interval, accepted the situation at once, and, being a woman, made the best of it, Nasmyth got the bottom-board, found his sheath-knife, and swiftly fashioned

a plank into a rough and ready rudder, by means of which he kept the boat's wake moderately straight. Progress of a sort was being made, but the idea of covering two hundred sea-miles in this fashion was unthinkable. Presently Faraday sagged forward, complaining of the pain in his hands.

"TAKE the rudder, then, I'll row," said Nasmyth. "Excuse me, Miss Stirling if I—" He filled the bailer with cool water and deluged the girl. Although she had made no complaint, he had noticed how parched her lips were and how drawn her eyes. "That's got to serve instead of a drink," he said. "Can you steer until we change places?" Yes, the girl could steer. She'd had had practice on river and lake, and knew the trick of it. Not that much steering was to be done when two such experienced oarsmen as Pardoe and Nasmyth were at the sculls. They pulled with the sweet precision of perfect machines, and the boat chugged hearteningly forward across the lessening waves, whose crests had now almost subsided.

"You can rely on me to do the very best for you, Althea," said Faraday in a low, confidential voice. The girl was very comely still; so comely, indeed, that a bit of a glitter showed in the man's eyes as they dwelled on her fairness.

"If you could give me a drink and some food," she said half-seriously.

"Certainly! Certainly I can give you food, at any rate." He reached for the two biscuits, as yet untouched. He did it masterfully, as though ready to assault any one questioning his rights. But Nasmyth, at stroke, reached, too.

"Hold on!" he said.

"It's for the lady," blustered Faraday.

"Oh, please—!" came from Althea. "I was only joking." Nasmyth ceased pulling. "Miss Stirling might as well know what we know," he said.

"It's ridiculous—ridiculous! As though we weren't ever going to see food again!" protested Faraday.

"Where? In the sky?"

"No; in the sea; teeming with fish." Faraday had been applying his colossal brain to the position, seeking remedies.

"Get some tackle and catch some, then."

"Why, certainly! Where is it?"

"There isn't any that I know of. But I'm going to try to make some. If everyone's agreed we'll have a council of war." He was no longer deferential; he was recognizing his power.

"Best thing we could do," said Pardoe. "I'd give—I've nothing to give!—but I'm dying for a cigaret."

"Here you are, then," said Althea; and from the bosom of her dress she produced a gold cigaret case bearing her monogram in diamonds.

"Manna in the wilderness!" said Pardoe.

"If it had been cigars, now!" said Faraday. "What are cigarets?"

"Better than nothing! Vote of thanks to Miss Stirling!"

"If you smoke you'll be thirstier than ever," warned Nasmyth; "and there's nothing to drink."

"H'm—that's sensible. But a single puff, now—"

"It's your own affair, of course—" There were six cigarets in the case, of a delicious Turkish blend. Pardoe knew the inveterate smoker's craving for he was a man who lived with a cigaret between his lips but he applied his reason and his will-power.

"I'll wait," he said. "It—it mightn't be fair to the others." The gold case was returned.

"WE'VE got to face everything squarely now," said Nasmyth. "Assuming those two biscuits are all we have or are likely to have—with God knows how long to go. But we must eat, though eating increases thirst. We'd better nibble a bit of biscuit apiece, slowly—very slowly. Those clouds are thickening to the nor'ard; they might come down and bring rain. I'll whack out the food." He carved almost infinitesimal fragments from a biscuit with his knife and passed them on his palm. To Miss Stirling first. Faraday chewed and bolted his portion, looked as if he would like to have snatched the main supply by force, and gloomed blackly as the crumbs titillated his healthy appetite. For he was at all times an excellent trencherman. Small as was his own share Pardoe surreptitiously concealed a full half of it. Althea nibbled hers without enthusiasm. She had never tasted a real flinty Liverpool pantile before; it savored of dog-biscuits to her. But hunger asserting its demands, she contrived to masticate slowly and swallow, though her throat was already uncomfortably parched.

## CHAPTER IV

### RAIN

"WE'D better make preparations to catch rain if it does fall," Nasmyth said. "No use being caught unawares; the squall might be over before we're ready."

"Well, get ready, then!" snapped Faraday.

"How do you propose to do it? I'll help all I can," Pardoe volunteered. He was watching the clouds, now thickening and certainly moving toward them. "I might start by getting the boat bone-dry," he suggested. "Every drop's probably going to count, and I don't see any storage place beyond the boat itself."

"There's the bailer; it'll hold a gallon; but the boat's the best cistern," agreed Nasmyth. He applied himself to bailing out such water as remained, and as no more was coming aboard, soon had the craft dry. He stripped off his shirt to mop up the residue. The wind was ceasing, and the sea was sleeking. The thick clouds were quickening their pace; and all eyes watched them eagerly, the thirst of the four increasing as sight of possible succor lessened the strain they had imposed on their will-power.

And then, almost as though Althea's prayers had split the clouds, the rain came down, not a shower but a deluge, crisp, cool, grateful. It flattened what remained of the seas, blurred the wide horizons, beat heavily on the upturned faces of the survivors. And of a sudden their growing depression lifted, as the magical kiss of healing water soothed them. The more superstitious minded among them read in this shower a direct answer to prayer; an evident proof that the God of their belief had not deserted them. In a vague fashion Faraday drew the conclusion that the elements realized his importance and magnificence. All welcomed the grateful drip of soothing water on their salt-caked skins. They conveyed the grateful fluid to their mouths according to their own fashions. Althea laid a foolish handkerchief in the sternsheets until it was saturated, squeezed it unsatisfactorily between her lips.

Faraday made a grab for the bailer, filling swiftly under a spout from a thwart-angle; but Nasmyth, nearest him, snatched the vessel away and rinsing it, switched the brackish contents overboard, replaced it until it was full of clear water and handed it to Miss Stirling. Pardoe had intended doing the same thing; forestalled he sucked the dripping cuff of his shirt. It was not until every one had assuaged the biting thirst that Nasmyth drank, remarkably lightly as compared with the others.

Then he busied himself in so mopping up the boat's interior in the deep run aft, that it would form a salt-free container for all the drinkable water they could save; watched the improvised cistern fill; worried a copper nail from the boat's structure, bent it to form a hook, hitched this to a line he hastily made from his own unraveled sock, which he weighted with his knife, thoughtfully baited the hook with a crumb of biscuit, and cast the whole crude thing overboard.

"They'll bite better in the rain," he said. His faith was justified. Hardly had the sheath-knife disappeared below the surface than a tug came; a considerable fish was hauled aboard.

"That's the style!" said Faraday complacently. "Looks good to me. Go on catching fish, my man."

"Try your hand at it; I can find something else to do," said Nasmyth, and passed the line to the financier's hand.

There may have been a note of malicious glee in Althea Stirling's voice when she interposed: "Oh, let me do that; I'm the useless member; and I'm sure Mr. Faraday can be better employed." Reluctantly Faraday passed the line to her.

"We might as well row a bit until we see how the breeze is coming," the sailor advised. "We'll be following the rain-clouds, anyhow." There being nothing else to do, rowing was resumed, and the boat made appreciable progress. Sailorlike, even in cascading rain, Nasmyth knew the compass-points, and steered due south by instinct. Faraday's blistered palms troubled him; he was an embodied protest, he grew half-mutinous.

"Let me try, then," said Althea; and shamed the grumbler into fresh effort. After a couple of hours the rain thinned to showers, and ceased altogether, with patches of vivid blue sky showing in the rifts above. Prior to its cessation Nasmyth, who was thinking for all, advised that each should drink copiously, so that the containers might be refilled to the brim.

"It mightn't rain again for a month here,"

he stated. He was proving himself an iron-hard man of infinite resource, and by contrast with his companions, a dominating factor. So at least Althea Stirling thought, viewing him through half-closed eyelids. She was of an impulsive, romantic nature, and real love had never touched her heart. She had believed herself affected more than once, but she had mystically searched for the ideal passion that should overwhelm her. Conventions mattered little to her; she promised to be a law unto herself. Faraday was ludicrous, Pardoe was willing but inept, and, contrasted with the sailor, foolish, like an untrained puppy anxious to ape its betters. Furthermore, in blue jersey and white drill pants tucked into half-boots, his bared arms tattooed with dragons, Nasmyth dressed the part; he fitted perfectly into the maritime picture. The other men were haggard, unkempt and unshaven, ludicrous in evening attire beneath a scorching noonday sun. That she herself was fantastic did not enter Althea's mind. The sailor's coat concealed the grotesque richness of her wilted evening frock. Her hands were ringless, beautiful hands; but not suggestive of artificiality.

"I WONDER how all this is going to turn out?" she meditated, watching the trailing line at intervals, watching the faces of her male companions at other times. "I suppose I ought to be afraid; but I'm not." Realizing how the gaze of all concentrated on her she understood something of what she really meant to the trio. One man had actually proposed to her; Pardoe loved her, she knew, but counted himself in some wise unworthy to avow that fact. His polite aloofness intrigued her. He was a problem, to be solved. A woman is perfectly aware when a man esteems her higher than the rest of her sex; her intuition seldom fails. Althea liked Pardoe enormously, liked his quiet gentility, his kind consideration and forethought. He lacked dash and verve, certainly, affecting the languor of his caste; but she knew him for a sound man and in all essentials a gentleman.

Faraday half-frightened her; she was of the type that needed to be dominated; inwardly she knew a sneaking regard for the brutal, cave-man type. She was masterful enough herself to require mastery. And Faraday was a born master. His proposal to her had been no bleated pleading; it had carried all the weight of an ultimatum. Even now he was regarding her possessively, mentally warding off other adventurers in his chosen preserves. But his massive driving power seemed diminished now; he was the least able of the three. Circumstances were his master. As for Nasmyth—

"A sailor?" Althea asked herself. But she admitted that the gold of his hair and his crisp, curled beard was attractive. He still looked well, notwithstanding all that had happened; and there was a glint of fire in his eyes that bespoke a dominant spirit if it were granted its opportunity. Civilization and its conventions seemed weak and very far away.

An hour before sunset a fresh and steady breeze came away from the north—dead-fair for the boat on her southward quest. Quietly, efficiently, Nasmyth made a collection of all spare garments and fashioned them into a rude attempt at a sail. This conglomerate result he hoisted to an upended oar, and the lean, clean-run boat promptly felt the urge. She drove through placid water with ease and a semblance of speed that was gratifying.

"We might as well eat what we've got, and then have a tarpaulin muster," Nasmyth said. He had previously cleaned the considerable catch of fish, and laid them to dry in the sun. It was unpalatable in a raw state; but the men contrived, driven by sheer hunger, to bolt certain portions and felt the benefit. Faraday even made elephantine jests and entreated Miss Stirling to pass the melted butter. Nasymth gulped his share uncomplainingly; he had eaten coarser fare in his day. Miss Stirling's gorge rose— She nibbled the portion of biscuit allotted to her, drank water, and made the best of it. Then they disclosed all their possessions. There was remarkably little that was likely to be of use. The jeweled cigaret-case was grotesque; so, too, was Faraday's massive gold cigar-case. Pardoe had some small money in his dress trousers pockets and nothing else, as he laughingly apologized.

"YOUR shoe-laces and brace buckles might come in handy," Nasmyth said. "And I've seen a fish-hook cut from a ring no better than that on your little finger."

"It's my mother's wedding-ring; but if

necessary it can be used," Pardoe said. "Oh—I think she'd like to think it had come in handy."

Faraday, in addition to the cigar-case, had a cigar-cutter, a paltry pen-knife, a bunch of keys, and considerable money. The cigar-case was empty; he had smoked the last prior to leaving the *Æneas*.

Nasymth called the "tarpaulin muster" a general pooling of their combined assets. It was his contributions that proved most valuable.

"You're the bloated capitalist in this new republic of nothing in particular," Pardoe said laughingly. "Lord, what an opportunity for an absolute monarchy! Your knife, your ingenuity—!"

Nasmyth produced in addition to biscuits, knife and a plug of tobacco, and considerable tangle of twine—"might have saved that sock if I'd only thought of it!" he said ruefully—the stub of a pencil, used for recording the reading of the patent log, two pipes, a water-tight match-box containing several matches; crumbs of biscuit and tobacco hopelessly mingled. "I can't think how that got there," he mentioned, producing it from the inner pocket of his watch-coat—a housewife, complete with needles, thimble, thread and even scissors. "Oh, yes—I do remember," he said. "I meant to patch my other pair of pants during my watch on deck. It might serve us a good turn." Beyond these articles and the actual garments covering them, they possessed nothing.

"Life reduced to its original simplicities," said Pardoe, speaking directly to Althea. "With its centuries-old conventions still adhering! I wonder if we shall sight land, and if there'll be people on it, supposing we do?"

## CHAPTER V

### LAND AT LAST

AT THE end of ten days they sighted a pallid blue cloud above a distant horizon, which Nasmyth—gaunt and haggard now, and barely able to speak—announced to be land. Faraday, his skin sagging over his emaciated face, dragged himself upright to stare at it, to cheer harshly. Pardoe patted Miss Althea Stirling's hand awkwardly and winked back tears, laughed, spoke encouragingly of rare fruits. Nasmyth altered course, and suggested that he and Pardoe should apply themselves to the oars to aid the faint wind that still blew favorably. None of them spoke of the sufferings they had endured; even Faraday had ceased to grumble. Indeed, with the realization of land, his own particular province, the financier seemed to assume that all trouble was over. He slumped down beside Althea, and possessively took her hand.

"We've won!" he said. "We're saved! Put your backs into it, you two!"

They were almost at their last gasp; and they had lived through terrible days. Times had been when it was necessary to restrain Faraday by sheer force from cutting loose in the fragile boat and jeopardizing the lives of all. He had suffered from a form of madness that trebled his enormous strength; and Nasmyth and Pardoe had been hard set to hold him within bounds. He had drunk more than his share of the hoarded water—brackish and foul now, such few drops as remained. They had been compelled to stun him with an oar-loom in order to prevent him draining the lot. But Althea had fared best of all; two of the men who loved her had sacrificed themselves in her interest, surreptitously permitting her as much of their share of the water as they could.

"We might make it," whispered Nasmyth out of a dry throat, and the effort of speech seemed almost to strangle him.

"We've got to make it—we've got to; pull hard!" croaked Faraday. And at the supercilious suggestion of superiority in his manner Nasmyth's long-restrained temper broke its bounds.

"Pull the damned thing yourself!" he snarled. "Do something, don't talk, you useless swab! Think you're lord high muckamuck here! You're ballast—ballast, dirty ballast!" Even a thirsty and hungry man may have his pride. Faraday, his mind still distorted, thought to see a wan smile on Althea's lips. He flamed into a screeching fury. All restraint fled to the winds; he hurled himself like a shell on the sailor, swinging blows to his face and head. All the concentrated venom of the tedious days found expression in his actions now. He had resented Nasmyth's assumption of command, had fretted at being required to work under his direction. To be derided in presence of the woman on whom he had

bestowed his affections stung like the knout's lash.

"I'll kill you!" he panted, swaying with weakness but hitting still. Nasmyth, accustomed to the rough-and-tumble fighting of the sea, dodged his uncertain blows, watched his opportunity, uppercut him neatly; so that he collapsed in the sternsheets, his head on Althea's knees.

"Oh, you brute!" sobbed the girl; and laid her arms about the bruised and sodden lump of humanity, hid her working face on Faraday's breast, and burst into a passion of tears.

"Steady on — steady on! Mustn't — mustn't make her cry!" said Pardoe weakly, attempting to rise from his thwart, but sinking back. He had all along admired Nasmyth; but now he felt that he hated him; if there'd been any sort of a weapon handy, he'd have liked to commit a savage assault on him. His nerves were abominably frayed by strain and lack of physical nourishment.

"MIND your own damned business!" fumed Nasmyth, though he himself was curiously perturbed by sight of Althea's distress. "Or I'll put you where he is—watch yourself!" He held himself ready for a further assault from Faraday, but the financier attempted nothing further. He threw a flaccid arm over Althea's shoulder and clung to her, and she did not attempt to rebuff him.

"Get at it!" Nasmyth stormed, applying himself afresh to his oar, rowing like a madman, so that the boat spun round in rough circles. Realizing it, the sailor stood upright facing forward, to row like a Maltese *dghaiso* man; and the breeze came away with fresh vigor as he plied the scull. He recognized that he must find vent for his seething rage somehow, otherwise he would heave Faraday overboard and, in all likelihood, Pardoe as well.

The fetters of shore-made laws never close as tightly about the men of the sea as about their more civilized brethren of the shore. He stared at the girl, marked how color rose in her cheeks, his breath came stertorously. A knowledge of power fretted within him. In sight was the land and the recognized codes; here, still, he was master, controller of destinies. His emotions shook him as the gale shakes the aspen; he shivered, clenched the oar-loom until it appeared the stout ashen wood might be crunched to splinters. But there were slow, weary tears in Althea's eyes, and they served as a spur to his flagging manhood. Difficultly he fought back the berserk rage, the eager desire to kill and bruise and maim; and plied his oar with ferocity. Until his depleted strength failed him, indeed, and he was forced to pause, gasping, the sweat drenching him, notwithstanding the parchedness of his frame.

Pardoe, watching him, understood to a certain extent the reason for his access of rage, admitted, wonderingly, that similar elemental storms had torn him, had been restrained, indeed, from open expression only by fear of punishment and physical hurt. But love under primitive conditions was purging him of such fears, and he knew he hated Faraday, believed he hated Nasmyth by reason of their rivalry.

"Why don't you kick that lazy hog into some sort of usefulness?" he asked the sailor, sick with the sight of Althea's interest in the once great man. "Why should we slave for him? He's never done his fair share ever since we started this."

"Mind your own business," snapped Nasmyth. Then the brooding, dreary silence fell again. They had long ago exhausted possible topics of conversation; had come to know distaste, indeed, at sound of one another's voices. Faraday had monopolised the debates as a rule, driving home wordy arguments, points that in other circumstances had been convincing; but which here, under a naked sky were merely ludicrous testimonials to his own vanished greatness. It was Althea who spoke first, after gnawing nauseatedly at a strip of sun-dried fish.

"I HOPE there's fruit on that island—if it is an island," she said. "Oranges for choice, ripe, juicy, bushels of them!" She stirred and Faraday, who had fallen asleep across her knees, sagged loosely to the boat's bottom. She gave no heed to him, staring toward the thickening cloud that was firm land; and steeping her fancy in sensuous imaginations. She had been compelled to live in her vivid imagination for many days, otherwise she must have lost her reason; but her ability to create dream-worlds had stood her in good stead. It helped her will power.

She had no wish to die, because she

believed that she might be of some real use in the world if she were spared; either as a mother of strong sons or the creator of inspiring works. And even now, notwithstanding the rigors she had been compelled to endure; the shocks that can best be imagined, the soul-wounds no less than the body discomforts, she could not bring her mind to consider this present state of affairs as final. Land meant to her everything that mattered, ease of body, ease of soul; the gratification of appetites, the silken caress of delicately intimate garments. She titillated her fancy by picturing steaming scented baths of rare marble; she composed menus of all the most tantalising and unobtainable dainties she could imagine. She tenanted her dream-worlds with smart, laughter-making and laughter-loving crowds, natty men, debonair, joyous, chattering women — and beyond that dull cloud she saw the realization of all these fancies. That the land might be as barren as the sea had been did not enter her calculations; yet so it proved when Nasmyth, exerting all his skill, screaming unimaginable curses at Pardoe and Faraday as they weakly plied the oars, piloted the tossing dinghy through a wallowing smother of turf, and beached her on the white, shelving sand.

"There!" he croaked, with the aspect of a conqueror; and dropped in a pitiful limp heap in the dinghy's careened bottom, as senseless as the wood on which he lay. And Faraday, himself in but little better case, scratched his head ruefully as he stared down on the man to whom they owed continued existence. He had teased himself with the thought, this masterful financier, that as soon as ever he was released from the thralldom of the sea, he would commit a bodily assault on Nasmyth, having first rewarded him with money. He felt, had felt during many days, that in all his life he had never hated any man as he hated the sailor, who had humbled his bombast in a score of ways. He had raged under a sense of inferiority; but had irritatingly comforted himself with the thought that, once on land, the positions would be reversed; for the land was his domain. He was known there, recognized for what he was. Only, even he couldn't kick a swooning man. He stood there, having leaped from the grounded boat, knee-deep in foam, and scratched his head.

"Get some of that fruit over there," said Althea curtly, beside the unconscious man and lifting his head. She sobbed as she spoke; for she knew that but for Nasmyth and the good strength and heart within him, she must long ago have died. And life now, somehow, seemed of infinite worth to this girl, ridded of all its ameliorations as it was.

"Fruit?" asked Faraday blankly.

"Yes— Look at the trees! They're almost down to the water's edge; there's certain to be fruit of some sort. Or water, at least. Get some." Faraday turned, with some reluctance; in time to see Pardoe, drenched to the skin, scrambling up the sandy beach as fast as his weakened legs would carry him. In a few minutes Pardoe was back, his shirt blouse filled with juicy fruits, two or three limes and oranges among them. He had not attempted to eat any himself; he held them out to Althea: she must be first served. But sight of the luscious stuff quickened Faraday to a frenzy of desire; he snatched at the handful, crammed an orange to his mouth, tearing the peel away with his teeth, like an animal. Pardoe flung the rest into Althea's lap, and leaped on Faraday striking weak, ineffective blows.

"Damned cad — greedy swine!" he coughed hysterically.

"Oh, don't—don't!" wailed the girl, as blood spurted; but she forgot her own dislike to the scene in Nasmyth's need. She peeled a lime dexterously and crammed it against his open, parched mouth, squeezing. Not until Nasmyth stirred and grunted did she attempt to satisfy her own overwhelming craving for the acid, juicy fruit. But as the first mouthful of juice passed down her aching throat: "There *is* a God!" she said profoundly.

Pardoe and Faraday ceased hostilities, but glared cordial dislike at one another instead of exchanging congratulations.

"Go and get some for yourself—don't expect me to fetch and carry for you," the slighter, younger man snapped as Faraday eyed what remained of the fruit longingly. Faraday, his face disfigured, slumped slowly jungle-wards; and not until his back was turned did Pardoe greedily wolf down a piece of fruit. It filled his veins with new life; he laughed:

"Everything's all right now," he gloated. "We're saved—saved!"

## CHAPTER VI

### BACK TO THE PRIMITIVE

THEY found swiftly that, here as at sea, they were almost entirely dependent on Nasmyth still. To the passengers the idea of land had always been that of a place where comfort, sufficiency, service could all be obtained by one willing to pay the price, in cash or kind. But this haven which had received them proved to be uninhabited, a trifling spot of earth. It is doubtful if it was more than a mile square, sloping to a ridiculous hill in its center, thickly verdant; washed on all sides by fuming surf, which thundered or crooned throughout the days and nights and soon became so familiar an under note to their lives that they must have missed it had it ceased.

The cramped quarters of the dinghy, the lack of necessity for effort, had not tended to educate the three passengers in the art of looking after themselves. Doubtless necessity would have taught them; but when Nasmyth recovered, he promptly set about adjusting life for them all according to the new conditions. And yet, in some indescribable way, the land appeared to dwarf him. Maybe the fact that Faraday was a big man who trod the earth pompously tended to this effect. In the boat Faraday had seldom stood erect; and his companions had lost the impression of his size. Pardoe, too, was not a small man, and as his facial hair was thickening, he had gained a suggestion of manliness. Faraday immediately resented the hint of command in the sailor's voice when he commanded the passengers to disperse and explore the island in an attempt to discover its resources.

"Things are changed now," he said. "Not so much of the gang-foreman about it, if you please!"

"Please yourself! Look after yourself, if you like, then," Nasmyth replied. "There's room for you to get away from the rest of us here, at all events."

"I think we'd better stay together," said Althea, the peacemaker; the initial cause, as her instinct told her, of all the masculine hostility. "We'll be safer so."

Thus, after reluctance, it was agreed. Faraday had no intention of deserting the party, especially Althea.

"THEN I vote that we still consider Nasmyth our captain; this is only a dinghy of a larger growth," suggested Pardoe. "You've been cast away before, haven't you, Nasmyth?"

"Yes; in worse conditions than these. Down in Kerguelen, where there were only seals and icebergs. I say that we'd better make arrangements for comfort before night falls. There aren't wild animals to be feared, so far as I know and it's very doubtful if there are natives. They'd have been down to see us by now if there had been. We'll look for water and food, and a sheltered corner to light a fire."

"I'll go and gather some more fruit, then," said Pardoe. "I feel as if I could eat lemons until I burst."

"Eat in reason, then, sir. Now, Mr. Faraday, if you'll gather dry wood—I have some matches left—we'll start a fire; I'll hunt for water." He was completely in command of the situation, now that his indisposition—the aftermath of the enormous strain and responsibility of the past days and nights—was gone. The acid fruit had worked a seeming miracle. Reluctantly Faraday complied.

"You'd better come along with me, Althea," he suggested. He craved for a moment alone with the girl; their recent existence had been so nakedly public that anything beyond formal interchange of remarks had been out of the question.

"Miss Stirling would welcome a bath when we find fresh water," said Nasmyth. "And fresh water there must be, judging by the vegetation."

"Lovely!" ejaculated Althea, whose entire body was sore and smarting from the effects of many thirst-quelling immersions in the sea; "a bath would be heavenly!"

AS A result the three set off together into the gathering sunset. Fuel was no difficulty; immediately they entered the jungle dead wood and leaves like tinder crackled under their feet. Fruit seemed to hang everywhere; they plucked plantains as they walked and ate them greedily. By reason of the noise of the surf it was not possible to listen for the trill of running water; but presently Nasmyth, in the lead, stumbled across a pellucid stream. The temptation was irresistible; with one accord the trio flung themselves down on their faces and drank to repletion,

gurgling their delight between the spacious mouthfuls. Nasmyth lifted himself first and raised a loud hallo to attract Pardoe's attention; presently they heard him approaching, guided by the sound. He drank in his turn, and, drinking, wondered what Nasmyth was after. The sailor was damming the trifling runlet with earth and vegetation, so that it banked to form a pond.

"If we men go on and find a camping ground, Miss Stirling can have a bath in comfort," the sailor said.

"That didn't occur to me," Pardoe replied ruefully.

"Well thought of, my man!" Faraday interpolated patronizingly. "That is if Miss Stirling has no fear of being left alone; if she has, I'll keep within hail."

"What is there to be afraid of?" Althea asked, itching for the caress of the limpid fresh water that was cool as if iced.

"Er—snakes—things like that," said Faraday vaguely. Then Nasmyth's derisive laughter stung him. Hotly flushed he joined the men, and when they were out of earshot: "One of these days I'll hurt you, my fine fellow!" he said. "I'm not the sort of man to be made ridiculous with impunity." But, heedless of the animosity prevailing, Althea made her preparations. She knelt down and, a woman even at this juncture, scrutinized her reflection in the mirror-like pool. She knelt back on her heels with a startled, disgusted exclamation.

"Oh!" she cried. "Ugh!" The exposed days had changed her appearance. Her evening frock of flimsy material had held together; Nasmyth's housewife being requisitioned occasionally; but it was sun-scorched and faded, it was merely a rag. That did not matter. Her shingled hair needed the barber's attention; it was bleached, dry, caked with salt, disordered. Her face was brick-red and peeling; alas for her once brilliant complexion! Her nose shone. After a second critical examination her innate sense of humor came to the rescue. She laughed: a soft chuckle that increased to noisy mirth.

"And you were afraid these three might murder one another for that!" she cried. "H'm! a lesson in humility; much-needed, my dear! Heavens! what an unholy fright! And never a speck of powder within a million miles! I suppose I ought to be thankful to be still alive; but what's the good of being alive if you look like that! Horrors!" She buried the offending face in the cool water, discovered that it smarted abominably; and then, finding cover in the lush foliage, disrobed and rolled luxuriously into the caressing fluid. It was, to her, as though a new life had been breathed into her veins; her soul expanded. It was not until she was thoroughly satiated with freshness that she realized that towels were non-existent; but the air was balmy; a warm wind blew; and as she crouched in her leafy shelter, she quickly dried. But there were sounds in the jungle—crackling, snortings, an occasional whimper. She had not been unduly afraid at sea; on land, land-born fears obsessed her.

She hurriedly redressed in her salt-soaked garments, heart-sick at her own helplessness, with difficulty she repressed an inclination to cry aloud. In the dinghy she had been able to see the hazards; here they were hidden from her and ten times more menacing by reason of their mystery. She knew a smart of resentment—against herself for her weak folly; against her companions for abandoning her; and with a cry of relief she hailed Pardoe when his tuneful whistle reached her ears. He had whistled as a warning; his cry answered her cry.

HE APPROACHED her from the other side of her bathing-pool; and, the twilight of the jungle descending upon them, she saw him as a thing attractive. "We're on this side," he said; "so you'd better cross over; wait; I'll give you a hand!" He drew her attention to natural stepping stones of coral rock across the stream; she essayed them, her foot slipped and she plunged—into Pardoe's ready arms. For a while, balancing, he held her there, palpitant, fragrant with freshness, her still-damp hair caressing his cheek. He was man, she was woman—elemental passion stirred in his long sluggish blood. He kissed her as he held her there; and for a moment, what of the relief of his presence and the new fright she clung to him permitting the embrace. His kiss lengthened, increased in fervor.

"At last!" he whispered. "You must have known—!" She released herself, laughing nervously. "Let me go, please," she commanded.

"Nasmyth sent me to summon you; they're making a camp. Althea—I've loved

you ever since I first saw you aboard the *Æneas;* but—"

"Don't you think it's rather cowardly to say so—under these circumstances?" she asked. Her brain, alert from its long semi-coma, showed her the difficulty of her position. She did not feel in the least in love with any of the enforced companions; she had come to look on them all impersonally. And she was a woman of common sense, if her mind was romantic. To show favor to any one of the three might be to arouse the direct hostility of the others; she would become a bone of contention, the originator of hates and strifes. She had already marked subtle changes in these men, the reluctant sloughing off of civilization's finer veneer. They were now no longer so closely bound by the ties of suffering and privation endured in common; their independence would have opportunity to assert itself in these new surroundings. There had been blazes in the boat—sharp, suggestive outbreaks. If these men fought for her, as ultimately might be the case, she would know herself unwittingly responsible for the harm that ensued.

"I'm sorry!" she said. There was just sufficient light remaining to enable Pardoe to see her face; it was set, the eyes held no kindling gleams. He was a gentleman still; he bowed gravely.

"I apologize," he said. "Weakness, lack of control—privation—a man isn't himself under the circumstances. I'm sorry, more sorry than I can tell."

"Please don't worry!" she whispered, and touched his arm. And she was nearer to loving Pardoe than ever before.

"Let's find the others," he suggested with forced cheerfulness; and shouted loudly. A double cry came back in answer; they proceeded in that direction and saw the warm glow of a fire through the undergrowth. Althea gave a little cry of delight at the picture presented as she gained the edge of the miniature clearing. It was at a bend of the stream, on higher ground; there was a backing of smooth, curiously shaped rock guarding it from the brisk wind that still blew but which the fall of complete night would kill. Warm though the evening air was the fire glowed invitingly. It filled the growing darkness with suggestions of mystery. The red glow was reflected from the breast of the rivulet, which seemed to be laughing gleefully.

Faraday was sitting to windward of the blaze, leisurely feeding the flames with dried brush; and pausing frequently to peel and devour another plantain. Nasmyth's back was turned; he was actively employed at some task. As Althea drew nearer she saw that he was dexterously fashioning a shelter, presumably for her. He worked energetically, and seemed to have a settled plan in his mind. His consideration for her privacy touched her deeply. All through the adventure this honest sailor's attitude toward her had been selfless and chivalrous. On his capable shoulders fell the heavier burden, and he bore it uncomplainingly, spending himself in the common service. She knew a wave of pity surge over her soul—she knew an emotion of real tenderness. Here was no man of words, of polished courtesies; merely a man who found his best expression in dumb devotion to her needs. She hastily went toward him, ignoring Faraday, who raised a bellow of welcome, and dangled a bunch of plantains for her interest.

"Thanks for the bath; it was exquisite!" she said. "What are you doing?"

"Making a bedroom for you—rough work; and we'll improve it later; but it will keep you private."

"Let me help; it isn't fair that you should do all the work this way." She was hardly aware of the unsteadiness of her voice, as she was unaware that there were tears in her eyes.

"I like doing it. Don't rob me of the pleasure," he said in a low voice. "It isn't much I can do—" She touched his busy hand, and she realized that he trembled at the contact. Mysteriously relations had undergone a change since they had left the dinghy—the sea had taught them impersonality; the land rekindled common emotions. Even Althea felt currents revive in her long parched ego. The sailor's readiness attracted her; she was in a mood to compare his adroitness with the lack of dexterity of his associates. The fleeting thought troubled her that, if there were no hope of ultimate rescue, a woman might do worse than surrender to such a one as Nasmyth.

IF THIS emotion that set her knees momentarily atremble were love, she told herself, it was crude, unspiritual love—the sex appeal undirected by the contemplative brain. But what of that?

Ordinary standards had gone by the board; the primitive had thrust itself into their lives, for weal or woe. As a cave-woman of the Stone Age might have looked favorably on the hunter who secured her the choicest tidbits, so Althea Stirling discovered herself realizing a new and potential interest in the sailor of the *Æneas*.

"You'd better go and eat something," he advised her. "I'll be finished here almost at once." She inspected the little bower; marveling at its neatness, her womanly soul tracing an expression of love in the structure. "You must have missed something like this," Nasmyth mentioned, "there in the boat—but there wasn't anything I could do. You'll be mistress of all you survey once you're inside here." The bower was made of stems and broad leaves, cunningly fastened with fibers. She made no attempt to move toward the fire until Nasmyth had completed the shelter to his satisfaction, and had floored it with dead leaves that were almost as soft as down.

"Tomorrow I'll find some palm-cloths for sheets," he said.

"It's wonderful!" Her youth returned to her; she clapped her hands delightedly. When all was in order Nasmyth sheathed his knife and stood aside for her to enter. She coiled down on the soft carpet—laid her head on an outstretched arm; and—in a moment was deeply, dreamlessly asleep.

Nasmyth listened for a moment or two to her regular breathing, tiptoed away, secured a bunch of plantains and, returning, laid them within the hut. Then he drew a rough door of plaited leaves across the entrance, and soberly returned to the fire, where Faraday and Pardoe were regarding one another without much friendship.

Faraday, gorged with fruit, toyed with yet another plantain. "They tasted like nectar at first; but a man'll soon get sick of them," he said, with a half-grumble in his voice. "So will Miss Stirling; we must find a change of diet for her. Well, Nasmyth; what's your opinion of the situation?"

"We're alive; that's the main thing." The sailor squatted by the blaze and swallowed a plantain, then another.

"Oh, yes; we're alive; I never expected anything else; but we're only just alive," exclaimed Faraday impatiently. "It isn't in human nature to be satisfied with this sort of thing for ever and ever amen!"

"It's better than salt fish and no water, anyhow," replied Nasmyth. "What do you think we ought to do?" He himself realized that he was deliberately endeavoring to expose Faraday as the most useless member of their little society. He was trying to prove himself the best man—and not for his own self-gratification, but in order to impress Althea Stirling.

"Do?" Faraday's strength was returning as a result of much fruit. He spoke forcefully, didactically, indeed. "Do? Get a move on; start something in the way of a rescue, of course."

"Why don't you begin, instead of everlastingly talking?" snapped Pardoe, immersed in his own private grief. "One way and another, I'm getting fed-up with your manner, Faraday. You forget we're all equal now—still equal; except that Nasmyth is head by virtue of his usefulness."

"Nasmyth's got to do as he's told," fumed the financier. "He knows he'll be paid for anything he does—especially for Miss Stirling." And with that half-sneered suggestion the wrath of Nasmyth broke loose.

"You think I built that shelter for her for the sake of a lousy tip, do you?" he asked, not loudly, for he was a sailor, and to men of his trade sleep is sacred. "Don't shout, either—think of some one else besides yourself. And your chance of flinging your damned money at me, like tripe to a dog, is about as remote as your chances of going to heaven, I'd say! Look out for yourself. If you rouse me, I'll leave you to fend for yourself, and then you can save yourself." The firelight on his face showed him almost tigerish; a rough man, elemental, ready to create his own laws and act upon them.

PARDOE aroused himself from his own miserable abstraction to throw oil on troubled waters.

"We'll never do anything if we bicker and fight," he suggested. "What's your suggestion, Nasmyth?"

"I've hardly had time to think things over. It's enough to know we're safe as we are, Mr. Pardoe. But we've built this fire on the highest part of the island and if we keep it going it will serve as a beacon

and might attract a passing ship. But I fancy we're a good bit out of the usual track of vessels; so far as I know—I'm not such an experienced navigator as all that—we've pulled clear away from the tracks to reach this island."

"It's a pity you didn't think of that sooner!" Faraday snorted, eying a plantain distastefully.

"We might have tried to the nor'ard, a thousand-mile run against the wind," said Nasmyth. "As it is we're here. Got to make the best of things. If we'd any tools we could try to cooper up that dinghy and rig her and sail away for something more civilized than this. We'd do as well to do something to occupy our time and thoughts. Anything's better than loafing. Men go broody and mad after a while, if there's no relief. I've seen it happen before. Good friends get suspicious of one another, remember old grievances, find cause for quarreling. Even if it's only digging a hole with a stick and filling it in again, it's better than nothing. But we might start by building a shack to shelter us when the rainy season starts."

"Accepting this thing as final isn't right!" protested Faraday.

"Making the best of it and hoping for something better is, though. At sea we were taught that nothing was hopeless; there was always a fighting chance. And we've got to do our best—for Miss Stirling's sake."

Faraday grumbled under his breath, but ultimately saw the rightness of the sailor's suggestion. He accepted Nasmyth's suggestion, indeed, that he should explore a coral reef near by, over which the sea crooned softly, for shell-fish. "Bring whatever you find; we can sort it out afterward," advised the sailor.

"Give me a job to do," said Pardoe; "I'm anxious to help." And within a little while the two men were tearing down bamboos, hacking broad leaves free from their stems, with Nasmyth's knife; making preparations for a house that should shelter them. Night found them weary; with a supply of collected mollusks, much fruit, abundance of water. They ate to repletion, discussed the situation afresh in undertones, for Althea Stirling was still asleep; and finally stretched themselves out to sleep beneath the stars.

So life on the unknown island proceeded, day in and day out.

## CHAPTER VII

### THREE MEN—AND A WOMAN

A PERIOD of six weeks passed without a relief to the monotony. No single sail had been sighted, even remotely; not so much as a trail of smoke had smudged the distant ring of the horizon. The only incident of note was that Faraday, determined to prove himself a man of resource, and against Nasmyth's advice had taken the dinghy unskillfully abroad in search of fish, and had hopelessly bilged her on a jutting spike or rock. Only with difficulty had he been extricated from his predicament—by Nasmyth.

The castaways were settled down into a certain apathy. As was inevitable in a small, narrow community such as this, they enlarged one another's weaknesses and shortcomings. Slow, creeping dislike for one another seemed to infect the men. But all three were as one in one respect: all three loved Althea Stirling. Being a woman, she knew it; and within her certain nameless fears slowly grew.

Nasmyth, after hammering violently, threw aside the chunk of wood and breathed deeply.

"I reckon that ought to suit Miss Stirling," he said. "That other hut was only a makeshift business at best."

"The more I see of you, Nasmyth, my friend," said Pardoe gravely, "the more convinced I am that we were lucky to have you for company since we had to be cast away."

"Oh, well! A man does his best! Now, that hut ought to stand against any weather—even if typhoons come."

"It's gorgeous," Althea admitted, brave in a tunic of palm-cloth. "Where's Mr. Faraday this morning?"

"Chasing that suspected pig."

"He'll be back anon, porkless, I expect," said Pardoe: a hinted sneer in his voice. "And he'll find fault with that hut, Nasmyth. Usual way, you know." They inspected the hut closely, until Faraday grumblingly reappeared. The island was so small that it was impossible to remain absent from the camp for long.

"Well, what about some dinner, Nasmyth?" the financier wanted to know. "I've chased that porker half-across the island, but he won't be caught. It's a pity

you hadn't presence of mind enough to bring a rifle!"

"Nasmyth's been too busy building a new hut for Althea to trouble about dinner, Faraday," Pardoe said.

"Looks like an ice-cream shop to me!" Nasmyth looked at Faraday calculatingly.

THE great man was everlastingly endeavoring to belittle the sailor's efforts, especially if those efforts were directed toward Althea Stirling's greater easement.

"Hold on, Nasmyth—you ought to know his poisonous temper by this time," muttered Pardoe, seeing the tensing of the sailor's muscles.

"Go and get some wood for the beacon fire, Mr. Faraday!"

"Sha'n't; I'm too tired; I wanted to get some meat for a change for Miss Stirling."

There was a tenseness in the air; men's tempers were frayed. A storm of more than common magnitude appeared to threaten; the crooning of the surf had taken on a deeper and more compelling note. Nasmyth knew an almost irresistible desire to fling himself on the still arrogant financier and beat him to a jelly. The magnate was an impossible companion.

"Go and do your share of the work, Mr. Faraday! I'll see to dinner."

Faraday turned away reluctantly. To take an order from a natural subordinate such as the sailor galled him. He felt he hated Nasmyth as much for his usefulness as for anything else. He detested Pardoe; but he counted himself Pardoe's master, physically and mentally; he was not so sure about the deck-hand. Sooner or later, he believed, it would come to a definite showdown; a contest of wills; but as Nasmyth was useful, it was as well to affect a show of submission.

"I'll get dinner," said Althea. "Will you help, Mr. Pardoe?"

Pardoe expressed readiness; Nasmyth, who had worked toilsomely, took advantage of opportunity to go for a swim.

"There's nothing much to do; Nasmyth's got everything ready," Althea said, after investigation. "Fish to boil, yes—bananas, yams. I used to *like* bananas. Set the bailer on the fire, please." Pardoe complied.

"Nasmyth's about the finest man I've ever met," he observed. "He pretends to be an ordinary seaman, but if they breed that type as a regular thing, well, no wonder we won sea-supremacy."

"He's certainly amazing," Althea agreed. "Always studying my comfort and well-being. In the boat, too, do you remember?"

"Put him in as hero of your next novel, then—and not a living soul will believe that such a man could exist. I've a great admiration for Nasmyth. I believe even Faraday is a bit afraid of Nasmyth. What's wrong?"

ALTHEA had suddenly given a sharp cry; looking toward her Pardoe saw her hand drip blood.

"I say—what is it?"

"Nasmyth's knife—I was trying—I believe I'm going to faint!" She spoke weakly. "It's the blood, you know."

"Hold on, Althea! Here, wash the cut first; mustn't risk poisoning." He thrust her injured hand into the washing pool, bade her hold it there, ripped a rag from his shirt, effected a clumsy bandage.

"Lie down for a bit," he suggested. "You're half-fainting already. I say, Althea, let me hold you up—so! Jove! how lovely your hair smells! I didn't make a bad job of that bandage, eh? I want to help you; I don't *like* being useless."

He was making talk to give her opportunity to recover herself. She had gone very white and her eyes were closed.

Indeed, for a moment or two, the girl lost consciousness. The sting of the cut had been severe, and she had never been able to stand the sight of flowing blood. Her eyes fluttered open.

"What's happened?" she asked. "Why'm I—"

"You gashed yourself with Nasmyth's knife; you fainted; it's all right now. Lean against me a little longer until you're steady—" He tightened his supporting arm about her. Probably it was the atmospheric tension that prompted him to say:

"God, Althea!—I wish I wasn't so useless! I want to help you; I want to keep you from harm. Althea—I—I care for you like the very devil!"

"Hush—hush!" whispered Althea. "Mr. Faraday's dinner will never be cooked."

"Damn Faraday! He's not your lord and master, is he?"

"Of course not! But—I think I'm a bit afraid of him."

"He's sloughing off his veneers, yes; showing himself the original cave-man. Althea, I wonder—supposing things go right; if we're ever rescued off this island, I mean—is there any chance that you could care? If you only knew the raging helplessness I fell when I see other men able to do things for you, while I—Althea; do you care? I mean—could you care?" It was out at last: the admission of love that had trembled on his lips for weeks. His hold of her tightened; the odor of her sun-bleached hair intoxicated him.

"Let me go, please," pleaded the girl. "It isn't fair."

"It'll have to be one of us three, you know; supposing we're not rescued. You can not be wife to all of us though we all care for you. Sorry—I'm a cad! Let me help you to your hut; I'll run this dinner through." He helped her to the hut, saw her stretch herself on the dried leaves with which Nasmyth had floored the place; returned to the fire. Faraday, after carrying heavy chunks of timber to the beacon, in a stifling atmosphere reminiscent of a Turkish bath, appeared.

"Hum!" said the magnate; "no dinner ready, of course?"

"Oh, so you've noticed it, have you?" Pardoe asked. He was taken out of himself. Had he not held Althea Stirling in his arms for precious, unbelievably precious, seconds?

"I've noticed that you'd rather loaf around and make love to Althea Stirling than do your job," snarled Faraday. "I saw you, you sneaking dog!"

PARDOE swung about, his eyes afire. "You can cut that sort of thing out, Faraday," he said. "I don't like you; never did like you; like you less than ever today." He seemed no longer to fear the big man; he was exalted; lifted out of himself.

Faraday, tired, ill-tempered beyond the ordinary, sneered and said hectoringly:

"Let me catch you philandering around with that girl again; and what's left of you won't know either how to like or dislike. Althea Stirling's my girl—!"

It had come at last: the inevitable fracas, the eternal dissension. Smoldering embers were fanned to a sudden flame, weeks of hardly concealed resentment found expression.

"Don't be a damned liar, Faraday! She's no one's girl," snapped Pardoe. "And don't talk to me like that!"

"I'll talk to you as I please. You paltry little loafer—you—!"

"I shouldn't try any cave-man work here, Faraday. You may be a tin god in civilization, but here you're only a blown-up bladder. Don't you think I'm going to stand your vulgar slanging—and if you want any dinner, get it yourself, and be damned to you!"

Faraday seemed to swell; his face suffused. "I've broken better men than you to bits for pastime," he savagely said. "I saw you, you sneak; making your dirty love to that girl—and she's my girl!"

"Show a bit of consideration for her, then. She's hurt herself, she's resting."

"Hurt herself? Then I'm going to her." But Pardoe nimbly barred the way; and in his hand was Nasmyth's long-bladed, terribly sharp knife.

"Stay where you are, Faraday," said the one time dilettante. "Don't play the hectoring bully. Althea's as much my girl as yours." The atmosphere seemed to draw still tenser. Sweat poured from Faraday's forehead where the veins were swollen portentously. "We're equal here, whatever we might be in civilization," said Pardoe.

"Are we? *Are* we? We'll see about that! Get out of the road!" bellowed Faraday.

"Don't play the fool!" There was good blood in Pardoe's veins. "What do you think you're going to do—steal the girl; same as you stole the last drop of water in the boat?" Faraday eyed the knife and snarled.

"Put that knife down, you dirty tyke! I'll show you what I'm going to do!"

"My good chap; I'll carve your liver out before I'll let you go near her," said Pardoe, wondering at himself. It was never his wont to be melodramatic.

Faraday mumbled words unheard by Pardoe; then his voice rose to a yell: "I'm going to have that girl, see? Fair means or foul! I'm going to have her! And I always get what I want."

"Not while I am here and alive; you won't get Althea Stirling."

"Then I'll get her after you're dead, you fool! If all the devils in hell stood between me and her—" he was lashing himself into a berserk frenzy. "Put that knife down!" The big man made a suddenly tigerish leap,

hurled himself like a stone from a sling on the slimmer rival; caught the armed hand, and with a fierce wrench caused the knife to drop. It was astonishing that a man could leap with such swiftness. He swung his sledge-hammer fist into Pardoe's face and rocked him backwards; but Pardoe recovered, and remembered his science. Of an instant the battle was closely joined; a mad scrambling mêlée. The leashed tempers were loose at last. Faraday fought with bull-like roarings, bellowing threats and curses; Pardoe fought silently, whitening, breathing sharply through pinched nostrils. They grappled, burst apart. Pardoe went down to a hit that would not have disgraced a piledriver. But he was up again, lean and active with a high spirit dominating him. The clamor fetched Althea staggeringly from her shelter.

"STOP—oh, stop, you brute!" she shrilled, as Faraday held Pardoe away with one mighty hand and drove blow after crashing blow into his unguarded face. They took no heed of her; it is doubtful if they heard her cry. Thunders rioted in their brains as blood dripped from their faces. They were like two atavists—insensate, intent on destruction. Pardoe recovered enough to swing a half-arm jab to Faraday's chin; and the agony of the blow drove the big man to blind frenzy. Pardoe staggered away, his hands flung to his smashed face, sobbing, sobbing at his impotence. He stumbled over a root, crashed to the ground.

"Had enough—beaten?" Faraday was over him, fists clenched, eyes evilly agleam.

"Not yet," spluttered Pardoe through bleeding lips. "I'm—I'm alive—" He picked himself up, but as he swayed on his knees, Faraday smashed him afresh to the ground. Althea cried out at the merciless ferocity of that blow. It was inhuman; but Faraday was no longer a human being; he was a raving devil. He scraped the earth like a triumphant buck; if the fallen knife had been handy it is possible he might have put a finish to the dispute without hesitation. But Pardoe caught at his leg and dragged him down; they rolled over and over, striking when blows were possible, throttling, tearing, snarling. Faraday broke loose and tottered to his feet. He was like a devil possessed of devils: a hideous spectacle. He quested about until his swinging hands encountered a jutting tree branch; he ripped it from the parent stem as it were the pith of an orange; poised it.

"No—no!" panted Althea; and flung herself, a shield, between Pardoe and imminent destruction.

"Stand clear, girl!" fumed the magnate, coughing thickly.

"You brute! You've killed him!" cried Althea.

"Not yet—but I will. Stand clear—!" He reached and grasped her shoulder, exerting what remained of his strength. "D'you want me to break you as I've broken him?" he raged. Touch of her seemed to awaken him somewhat from the fighting trance into which he had plunged. Roughly he caught her to him, breathing stertorously.

"My woman—I've won you!"

"Promise—promise not to kill him!" She was woman enough to grasp any opportunity.

"What's the worth of killing a worm? *My* woman!" Dropping the bough he thrust her head back and pressed his bloody lips to hers. Althea cried out at the defilement; and Nasmyth, invigorated by his swim, came running. He seized Faraday's shoulder and swung him clear.

"Let go!" he said.

"Don't you interfere," panted Faraday. "Would you?" In his insensate rage he hit Nasmyth painfully. "Stand clear; that's my girl! I've won her—!"

"Not yet," said Nasmyth. And he laughed. Customarily he was not a laughing man and the sound was surprising. "You haven't licked me yet."

"Stop!" Althea called. "I won't—don't—" And yet, secretly, some hitherto unacknowledged part of her was reveling in this situation. The primitive that all civilization's overlay cannot entirely stifle, poked its head through the careful veils of the years. She was a prize, to be fought for; a thing greatly to be desired by these men. A thrill shook her.

"THEN I will—now!" thundered Faraday, rejoicing in his recent triumph. His arrogance had taught him to despise men of lesser mold than himself; Nasmyth was of a caste apart. He struck again, but found his blow countered by an arm like a steel bar.

"I shouldn't—I shouldn't!" warned Nasmyth. "If I start fighting—" But Faraday flung caution to the winds. "Do your

damnedest!" he rioted, and closed. Nasmyth was a smaller man, but tougher; many years of hardship had rendered him agile, capable of taking extreme punishment. And while these two giants fought Althea dropped on her knees beside half-conscious Leonard Pardoe, and lifted his head to her breast.

"All—all—right," the beaten man panted. "I'm a no-good, eh? Can't even fight for the girl I love. Faraday's going to get you as he said—" And Althea wondered if he would. She had been impressed before by the financier's merciless purposefulness, had listened to his boasts of unparalleled victory. He was ruthless in the common affairs of life; he would be ruthless in his loving. She saw herself as a pawn in the game of masculine rivalry. During the time she pondered, laving Pardoe's broken face with cool water, the fight went on. It was like the combat of two rutting stags. It stamped noisily to and fro; Faraday shouting bellicosely. Nasmyth fighting silently, wolfishly. Faraday went down, recovered, hurled himself forward, to be rocked by a crashing blow. He stormed in afresh, cast his great arms about the sailor; disregarded the short jabs that assailed his face. But he was tiring—he had expended much effort.

"If Faraday wins—!" panted Pardoe, struggling to watch the conflict.

"I'm afraid of him; he's terrible. He'll kill you both if you stand in his way," gasped Althea.

"He'll get you; he says he always gets what he wants. He'll thrash you into submission—a family trait, by all accounts."

"Don't talk—please."

Disregarding her entreaty: "Funny thing human nature, Althea!" Pardoe said. "Nasmyth's fighting for you, just as I fought—and he's the best man of the three of us."

"Mr. Faraday doesn't seem to be fighting fairly," said Althea, watching the conflict with awful fascination.

"Human nature in the raw!" said Pardoe wryly, between swollen lips. "When there's a woman at stake—the animal comes to the top. You'll have to make a definite choice after this, Althea."

"I? I won't! I'm a free agent!" The sullen crash of heavy blows did not diminish. Both Faraday and Nasmyth had taken heavy punishment; but Nasmyth's face had suffered less than his opponent's.

"No, you're no longer a free agent—not now. Things are a bit different from what they were; we're raw savages again."

"We needn't be," protested Althea.

"Women love a master—Faraday says so. I expect you'll reconcile yourself to it. Drip a little more water, please—honorable scars, eh?" He tried to laugh but groaned instead; for he loved this girl better than his life. "What's happened?" Faraday had crashed to the ground like a felled bullock. Nasmyth pounced on the fallen man, dragged him like a carcass to where Althea knelt beside Pardoe.

"NOW, then," panted the sailor; "millionaire or no millionaire, apologize to the lady for annoying her."

"Be damned if I do," stuttered Faraday, weeping actual tears; but still defiant.

"If I start in again—" Nasmyth threatened; and Faraday attempted to rise. He was thrown back.

"Please don't strike him again, Nasmyth!" cried Althea.

"Oh, all right, Miss—so long as he behaves himself," answered the sailor. Faraday growled a threat; hinted that he wasn't finished with yet.

"I think it's shameful—horrible that I should be fought for like a dancing girl in a café!" protested Althea.

"You shouldn't be the tantalizing little devil you are, then!" sputtered Faraday.

"Silence—you!" said Nasmyth. "Wait until I've said something. It looks as if I'd won out in this rough and tumble. Miss Stirling—you shall judge. Unless you make some sort of definite choice we men will be fighting and scrabbling like Kilkenny cats, until we've eaten one another up. Listen—if you'll chose one man, the two others'll agree to abide by it; I will, for one. We all three love you, I fancy, in our different ways. I don't imagine there's much chance of our being rescued—not for God knows how long, anyway. We seem clean out of the track of ships. We've seen nothing during all these weeks. Choose one of us—"

"How can I?" protested Althea.

"We'll abide by your choice, Miss Stirling; and you'll save no end of trouble by choosing. It's got to be that or everlasting trouble. We're human beings. You agree to this scheme, do you, Pardoe?" The sailor carried himself as a conqueror; but without arrogance.

"I agree," Pardoe replied with a grimace. The position might not be so hopeless as he had imagined. Women often pitied the weaker man, and out of pity love often grew. "I think you're damned generous, Nasmyth, in giving us others a chance."

"You agree, Faraday?"

"Damn you—I suppose so. It's all rot—we're sure to be rescued."

"Will you choose, Miss Stirling?"

"It's hateful; it's abominable—it's wrong!" Althea protested.

"It's a sensible solution; I wish I'd thought of it," said Pardoe.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CHOICE

NASMYTH had installed himself as president of the conclave. It was perhaps the most curious ever assembled. But there was right in it. So long as Althea stood, a bone of contention, amongst the three, so long would animosity prevail. Each man would imagine himself entitled to her favor.

"Let each man say what he can for himself," said the sailor. "You start first, Pardoe."

"Thanks! It's decent to give me a chance. I'll tell Miss Stirling that I'm not a great fellow; I'm smashed almost to bits now; I'm a weakling; but—I've tried to do the decent thing; and I care—by God! I care. I'm glad I've been smashed up for her and I'd give every drop of blood in my body to save her from trouble, if I could. If I were in civilization—"

"We're not in civilization; but we *might* be rescued," put in Nasmyth. He was eminently fair; even Faraday looked at him in astonishment, not knowing how the sailor's genuine love for the girl had altered him.

"At home, I could offer you a lot," panted Pardoe. "Here—only love! I can't do one-thousandth part of the things for you that Nasmyth can, but I—I care—"

"*Must* I choose?" demanded Althea.

"It would be wiser, I think," said Nasmyth. "You next, Faraday."

THERE was a recrudescence of old arrogance in the financier's manner; ludicrous though it seemed, when coupled with his terribly battered face. "I don't think we're going to be here for ever," he bellowed out of his misshapen mouth. "What I mean is: we'll be rescued. Search parties 'll be out already. I'm Michael Faraday! The world won't let me go without a search. I love you, Althea—I loved you aboard the *Æneas;* I love you now. Don't think that because this man licked me I'm down and out; I'm not. He fought a tired man. I've never been properly beaten yet. Give me a chance, I can make you love me in return. Your choice is for always; and you've got to think of that. I can offer you everything your heart desires. Everything. I don't think you are to be bought, Althea—I'd hoped it might be possible; but—perhaps my love for you—" His bruised face worked terribly; he was very much in earnest. For once he shed his arrogance and stooped to plead. "For God's sake—!" he stammered, and Althea was conscious of a lump in her throat. He made her afraid. "If we're rescued, Althea, there's nothing you can't have. I'm nothing here, maybe; but back there at home, I'm a power to conjure with."

"But we mayn't be rescued—" sobbed Althea. And as Faraday seemed to have said his say, she half-consciously turned to Nasmyth.

"My turn?" the sailor asked. "I started caring as soon as I saw you come aboard the *Æneas*. When the trouble started I thought: 'I've got to save Miss Stirling.' In the boat I thought: 'I've got to make things easy for Miss Stirling!' I tried to."

Althea said brokenly: "I know that, none better. But for you I'd have died. But for your wonderful courage and determination."

"Oh, it was mighty little I could do. It was easy to do it, for you. If we're kept on this island, I might be able to go on doing it—whoever you choose. I'd try to make you happy. I believe I could. I'm just a sailor—"

"No; not quite that; a gentleman!" Althea said.

"But I'll work for you, think for you, fight for you. And maybe I can love as well as these others."

"Give me time," pleaded Althea as the sailor ceased. But she knew—she knew! She was a woman and she knew.

"Nasmyth!" she said unsteadily.

Pardoe gulped: his own heart had told him he had had no real chance. Faraday started forward, bruised fists clenched,

breath coming sobbingly. It seemed incredible to him that the girl could deliberately select any other than his own self. His inflated pride refused to succumb.

"Althea!" he cried.

"Nasmyth," she repeated, with growing firmness. "And I'll tell you why? He saved my life—I've always been afraid of death. He saved your lives, too, mastered the situation. He was gentle and thoughtful in his mastery, though. Nasmyth is a natural gentleman. He denied himself water in the boat so that I might have his share. He fed me when I was hungry, eased my misery in a thousand ways. He clothed my nakedness, respected my modesty. He gave me his coat first thing—and I'm a woman—with modesty. All along he considered my feelings, forestalled my wants. So I'm choosing him if he'll have me; to be his girl—"

"What's that?" asked Pardoe, arousing. "Thunder? You said a storm was brewing, Nasmyth—"

"Thunder—no! That's a ship's rocket-signal! Hold on!" Nasmyth sprang swiftly to the hill-summit beyond the camp. Creeping into the miniature lagoon was a lean, white steam yacht! During the fight and the ensuing conclave she had approached unnoticed.

"A ship!" yelled Nasmyth.

"I knew we'd be saved," said Faraday, nodding. "I knew they wouldn't let me disappear. Of course, this alters everything."

"A ship? A ship?" Althea's color came and went under the tan. "No; it doesn't alter everything. It doesn't. I made my choice. I counted on the chance of rescue. My choice holds!"

BUT on the instant all values appeared to have altered astonishingly. Civilization had laid its hand upon them all. The old gods had returned, bringing with them their retainers—public opinion, fear of criticism. Althea became aware that she was sun-scorched, half-naked, grotesquely attired in palm-cloth sewn together by Nasmyth's needles and thread. The rattle of the yacht's anchor-chain sounded surprisingly near by reason of the tense atmosphere.

"I'm going down to the beach," stated Faraday. "Coming, Althea?"

He spoke possessively. He was again sure of his ground.

"Presently," Althea said, and moved toward the slight elevation where stood Nasmyth. "I'd like you to know," she said, defiantly, "that I keep to my promise, Nasmyth." His eyes glowed into hers; he made a quick, fierce movement, as though about to seize her. Then he stiffened, and she saw his hands grip until the knuckles whitened.

"I don't hold you to it," he said hoarsely. "If we'd been forced to stay here I'd have taken you—thanked God with every breath I drew for you, for your love; the thing I've hungered and thirsted for. It's been my love for you that's taught me to care for you, that showed me the way to save your life. But the world's come back to us now. Don't you see how things are altered? I'd drag you down; I'd degrade you, if I kept you to your promise."

Althea said, surprisingly: "I'm sorry that ship's come."

"Good God! Do you really care, then?"

"I'm—afraid so. I must care, because even now—it doesn't seem to make much difference. The world outside doesn't seem as attractive as it did."

He fought with himself, swallowing hard. "No!" he gulped. "Hear me: I won't take your promise. I'd drag you down; I'd destroy the fineness of you. I know it: you're fit to be something better than the wife of a man like me. Look! they're lowering a motor-launch from that yacht! We'll go back to civilization; and I'll carry a memory with me, but—you're free. It was only a minute's foolishness, when all's said and done. Now—come down to the beach!"

"You won't take me?"

"No. There'd be regrets—you don't understand. Come along." He spoke masterfully, roughly, indeed. She looked at the yacht: the embodiment of her world; she looked at the island. Then, smiling wisely, she moved toward the beach. But already Michael Faraday was there; swelling with importance, waving excited arms to the launch, directing it to a landing-place.

"SO YOU'VE come at last!" he cried, when the boat was within hail. The craft beached softly upon the sand; a man in the sternsheets leaped out.

"Who're you?" he asked. "We saw your smoke."

"I'm Michael Faraday, of course. The man you're seeking for."

"Michael Faraday! Oh! Can't say the name's familiar. Been having a wake or something? I thought you might be someone else."

"You don't understand. I'm Michael Faraday; *the* Michael Faraday. I suppose you've been dispatched to search for me?"

"No; can't say I have. How is it you're here?"

"Survivors—from the *Æneas!*" It seemed impossible to Faraday that his greatness should pass unrecognized.

"Then you are from the *Æneas!* Good! Have you by any chance a man with you—sailor—name of Nasmyth?"

"Ye-es; there is a Nasmyth." Faraday was nonplussed. "He's on the island. Four of us—Miss Stirling, Leonard Pardoe, myself—".

THE man from the launch acted surprisingly. He gave a cry and burst past astonished Michael Faraday, ran up the beach, to meet Nasmyth and Althea. He clapped Nasmyth on the shoulder. "Glory be!" he said heartily. "I'd recognize that old physiog anywhere! How are you, you old dog, you!"

"Hemingway!" gasped Nasmyth. Two hands gripped tightly; and somehow Althea, watching aghast, felt a quivering lump in her throat.

"You blighter—you—oh, my God! Bill—Bill! Why did you do it? Think of the trouble you've given me to run you down! Here, of all places!" The newcomer was incoherent, pumping away at Nasmyth's hand in a fury.

"What is it?" It seemed to Althea, to Faraday, too, who had joined the group; as if the sailor's knees knocked together.

"It's—why, man, everything. You splendid devil! Branstone died; admitted he'd killed Roger."

"Oh, so he admitted it, did he?" said Nasmyth slowly. "He admitted it?"

"Of course he did." The man from the launch turned to Althea. "What do you think? Took the load of another man's sin on his shoulders; cleared out—vanished. Every one thought he'd done it, naturally—"

"That's what I wanted them to think," said Nasmyth. His manner seemed to have altered, a roughness had gone from his speech.

"And in reality it was his brother—damn Roger! He deserved to be killed, anyway."

"When did Branstone die?" asked Nasmyth.

"Months ago! I started out to hunt you down as soon as the truth was out. Didn't you see the papers?" Nasmyth shook his head.

"I advertised for you, did all I could. Knew you were somewhere out East; came out in search. Traced you here, traced you there! Found you'd shipped as sailor aboard the *Æneas*. *Æneas* was lost—most of the people saved, though."

"Ah! they were saved, were they? I'm glad of that."

"You weren't among them. I found out the locality where the ship was lost; reckoned up what you'd be likely to do, if you were saved. I've searched all the islands about here, sighted your smoke today; here I am. Well!"

"So Branstone's dead, is he?"

"Yes. Why did you do it?"

"I don't know. I'd promised the mater—I was always the stronger, though he was the elder. I'm bewildered. Afraid I let myself drift a bit out here. Hold on!" He suddenly snatched Althea firmly about the waist.

"That promise of yours—I accept it now, if it still holds," he said. "I couldn't before—not in civilization. But everything's altered."

"Everything's altered except my promise," said Althea. Before them all she reached her arms to Nasmyth's neck and slowly drew down his head. "I'm glad I promised before I knew," she whispered.

*A Genuine Humorist New to You Offers*

# *Westward Ho! Kum!*

*By* THOMAS THURSDAY

LIVES there a guy with soul so dead who never to himself has said:
"What hit me?"
Well, maybe there is; but personally speaking, his name ain't Ballyhoo Burns or yours for tough luck, Doc McGill. If you have a moment to spare, please adjust your headphones and get a load of this!

It was while me and Ballyhoo was touring God's own country—boloney for the West—that we had the displeasure of meeting "Pelican-beak" Snyder. At the moment of going to press, as the tailor remarked to the pants, we had just quit trouping with the *Great McGinty-Ginsburg Circus and Side-Show,* or, to make a clean breast of matters, the show collapsed. Soon after this annoying thing happened, me and Ballyhoo boarded a passing freight, and got shacked off in a slab entitled Embalmers' Gulch.

"If we want to eat tasty and often," says Ballyhoo, as we ambled down the main drag, "we better start some snappy promoting, and I don't mean I just think so!"

"You'll have to do the heavy thinking, kid," I says, "I'm a little perturbed."

We arrived in front of the post-office, and mixed with a mob of hombres who were reading a poster. Being unnaturally curious ourselves, we eeled in and got a load of this: *"Wanted.* For Murder! Horse Stealing! Robbing Mails! Arson! Holding Up Cactus Canyon Express! Assault and Battery! Deserting Wife and Children! Bigamy! Passing Counterfeit Money! Etc. Etc. Known as 'Cock-eyed' Perkins. Two Thousand Dollars Reward—Dead or Alive. But Preferably Dead. (Signed) Jim Riley, Sheriff, Sage County."

"A tough lad," says Ballyhoo. "He must of forgot to kill his parents."

"And a tough burg," I says. "I bet they have as much use for showmen in this drum as I have for six ears!"

"We'll soon see about that. Meantime, I have a idea to gather some jack. To begin with, I'm no less than Professor Omar Bey, of Cairo, Egypt."

"Does that make me an Elk?" I enquires. "What's the racket?"

"In my native land I had the reputation of being the greatest hypnotist ever born to live. With a few passes of the hands, I have put thousands of people to sleep."

"Did you nick the ax?"

"Be good," he says. "It being understood that I'm the world's best hypnotist, it should also be understood that you're the very private secretary to the same. From now on Professor Bey will work in the interest of science, art, and assorted—"

"Liverwurst," I helps out.

"Correct," he admits. "That being all settled, all we got to do now is to promote some joint to give the exhibition. After that we dig up some dizzy sap to act as subject."

"One of us is crazy," I suggests, politely. "What do you want a subject for?"

"To bury alive for six days," he says. "First, I hypnotize him, then put him in a wooden box, and sink 'im in the earth. All those interested in scientific demonstration, may witness the exhibition at two-bits a head."

"Just where," I asks, "do we locate a clown who would be willing to enjoy the quietness of a coffin for six days and nights?"

"That's the business of my secretary," he retorts. "All you gotta do, Doc, is to mosey around and find some lad who looks positively dumb."

"In *this* town? Hell, Big Boy, I'll get shot! Mamma never raised no stupid children!"

"Take a chance," he says. "If we put it over, we stand a show of cleaning up handsome."

"Let me get you right, brother," I says. "First, we get a hall, or a barn, or anything, and then grab off some simp to work with. Then you hypnotize him, and bury him alive."

"For six days and nights," adds Ballyhoo.

"What the hell does he eat—worms?"

"Nothing like it. He comes out of the ground each night, or just as soon as the cash customers leave the joint. Then he can eat until he gets cramps in his ears. Of course, we'll have to keep him out of sight during the exhibition, otherwise the lariat-tossers around here might not care for the joke."

"Would you mind explaining the entire gimmick?" I pleads.

"A boob is a terrible thing," he hints. "Listen. On the first night I hypnotize the subject."

"With a brick?"

"After I have him in a state of complete hypnosis, I place him in a plain pine box, six feet long and two feet wide. Next, we nail down the cover, dump the box in a hole nine feet deep, then cover him with the earth. That accomplished, I announce to the audience that the gent will remain in the ground for six full days and six full nights. The big idea is to have the suckers come in each day to see how the subject is progressing. Les' have your applause, Doc; I admit I'm good!"

"How do the customers look through the earth and see the subject?" I wish to know.

"Why be a blue-ribbon chump?" he snorts. "Who said the folks would have to look through the earth in order to see the subject? Listen, ape, and get me right: When we place the stew-bum in the ground, we attach a nine-foot shaft to the head of the coffin. This shaft sticks up above the ground, or surface, and all the customers have to do is to peek down and see the gent's head and shoulders."

"They can see right in the dark, hey?" I says. "Believe me, a guy would have to have a eye like a whole family of eagles to see anything buried in eight feet of blackness. Come again!"

"Forget you're a showman, and use your brains," he fires back. "Who says they'll have to peer into the darkness? What d'yer use your head for—just to keep your ears apart? Listen! We settle that by suspending a light from the middle of the coffin, so when the folks look down they'll get a full view of the subject's head, shoulders and even whiskers."

"That's that," I says.

"It is," says he. "Now that you understand the gaff, get busy and promote me a subject for the act. Meanwhile, I'll look around for some barn to give the exhibition in."

"You give me a large and dangerous order," I says.

"All you have to do is fill it," he snaps, and walks away briskly.

WELL, to reduce a tall story, I searched around that burg for two hours without promoting anything but a headache. The lads I was about to approach looked tougher than a yard of Florida beef, and I knew if I even suggested that they could earn some jack by nestling in the ground, for only six days and nights, they'd prob'bly fix me so that

I'd remain in the ground forever. What's the use of being killed whilst so young?

I returned to Professor Omar Bey empty-handed. I found that he had promoted a large, well-cracked barn, for which he paid the dumb-bell owner five berries for the week. As I entered I found him with a shovel in his hand, digging a hole for the coffin.

"Where's the subject?" he snorts, mopping some sweat off his pan.

"Can't find none," I says. "The boys around this slab looked a bit too rough for me. Why, even the kids carry six-guns! Les' pull out of this burg and go where there ain't so much outlaw and disorder."

"Hell!" he raves. "You got a spine the color of a grapefruit, all yellow, what I mean! I'll bet you a doughnut against the hole that I can dig up a subject in ten minutes, if not sooner. Here, grab hold of this shovel, and yank up some earth; I'm on my way to promote a six-day sleeper."

At that moment, a weird noise breaks the debate. It sounds like a flock of sawmills playing jazz.

"What's 'at?" demands Ballyhoo, peering around.

"Spirits," I says, not seeing anything in sight.

Another snore busts the silence, and we look overhead in the hay mow.

"How did a cow get up there?" demands the quack professor.

"Do cows snore?" I asks.

"Well, maybe it's a horse; it ain't no alligator, that's a cinch. Grab that ladder, Doc, and go up and investigate. If you need any help, I'm right down here."

"I'll be right down here myself," I says. "Go up yourself, Big Boy!"

"D'yer think I'm afraid? Watch me, brother; I received my training in the marines!"

He stacks the ladder against the mow, and shinnies up. For a while I hear him flopping around the hay, and wish him luck.

"Hey, there!" I hear him yelp," is there anybody dying?"

I hear a moan.

"Who's there?" demands Ballyhoo. "Come out with 'em up, or I'll bust you one!"

"Whar am I?" groans a husky voice.

"Hotel Astor, suite Number Nineteen," replies Ballyhoo. "What's the matter with you?"

"Dunno, pardner," says the voice.

"Plenty of hard likker, hey?" goes on my playmate. "In other words, kid, you've been on a moist diet. Well, poke your pan outta that hay, and les' see what you look like, if anything."

"I shore feel dizzy," goes on the snorer.

"Fine!" says Ballyhoo. "You're just the guy I need for the act. Are you willing to do a little work?"

"Hell—no!" says the lad. "Work allus annoyed me, pardner."

"Well, this is all fun, and no work, and you get paid for it."

"Mebbe so, hombre; mebbe so."

"Come on down stairs, and I'll shoot you the plot. Here—lemme help you. Steady, brother!"

Ballyhoo climbs halfway down, and then his new boy friend peeks over the edge. Speaking of eye-distracting mugs, you should of got a squint of what I saw. Holy cats, what a treat he must of been to his parents! To begin with, he's got more whiskers on his pan than a complete set of Civil War generals, whilst his nose was a prominent citizen. No fooling, I'd be tickled silly to have it full of dimes!

"If you can't climb down, brother," says Ballyhoo, "just fall. One more wallop won't do you any harm, and it might wake you up."

"Comin', fellow," says the booze-buster. "Whar's muh feet?"

"They ought to be around some place," I says. "Try a swan dive, and you won't need any feet."

It takes him five minutes to crawl down the ladder, and then he misses the last three rungs and lands on his ear.

"Meet my private secretary and manager, Doc McGill," says Ballyhoo. "I'm no less than Professor Omar Bey. Er, what did you say your name was?"

"Huh?" asks the lad.

"I was asking for your name," goes on the professor.

"Muh name is—eh, lemme think—wal, I guess my name should be Snyder."

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Snyder," beams Ballyhoo, with a mock bow. "If you ain't got a first name, I'll give you one. Getting my inspiration from the size of your nose, I'll just call you 'Pelican-beak.' How's that?"

"And gittin' my inspiration from the size of yours," yawns Mr. Snyder, "I'll just call you 'Flat-beak.' Fair 'nuff, huh?"

"Great!" okays Ballyhoo. "That being all settled, les' get down to business."

During the next half hour the professor explains to Pelican-beak just what he wanted him to do, but when the subject heard that he was to nest in the ground for six days, he almost sobers up.

"I don't savvy, pardner," he says. "Stickin' in the ground fur six days and nights may be a prime place to hide out from yore missus, but how about the pork chops and a nip o' har-r-rd cider?"

"Don't worry about that," soothes Ballyhoo. "You won't have to stay in the ground for six days and nights. As to food and—er—water, you'll get plenty."

"Water?" asks Pelican-beak, blinking.

"You can have har-r-rd cider, if you wish," replies the professor.

"I shore wish," confesses the boy, and that was all settled.

Being appointed press-agent for the great bust, I get up bright and early the next morning and induce the local print-shop to knock off five hundred "dodgers" announcing the fact that Professor Omar Bey, the World's Greatest Hypnotist, would amaze and dazzle the town, beginning next Monday, at 3 P. M. On the back of the cards, I had another assortment of applied piffle that would have made the Grimm Brothers' quit tearing off fairy tales. Briefly, I stated that the professor would attempt to hypnotise a living, breathing human being, toss 'im in a pine box, and then deposit him in the bowels of the earth for six full days and six equally full nights. More, the sleeping cutey wouldn't get a nibble at any food or drink for the entire week, and he was doing this at his own risk, just to further the advancement of science and the medical profession in general. At the expiration of six days, the jovial professor wouldst exhume the subject, and make an effort to bring him back to life. However, if the professor fails to revive the gent, it meant that said gent had departed hence or, to be more precise, the subject had made arrangements to kick the bucket.

I SPENT the next two days in plastering these placards around Embalmers' Gulch and the adjoining cow burgs, and when I got through I had the place "covered" like spots on a leopard. The gladvertising campaign went over like Niagara Falls, and aroused more interest than a savings bank ever pays. When opening time arrived, so did the mob, and what a hard-looking bunch of hombres they were! Those that didn't carry one gun, had two, and to ask them to kindly check the undertakers'-pal stuff at the door would be the same as requesting the north pole sector to sprout palm trees and kumquats. The price of admission was only two-bits, and if I had any idea of mitting any change, I took one look at the corrugated maps and shelled out square.

Well, speaking of corn pod, twenty minutes after we had opened the door, we had that barn packed like a chorus girl's trunk, en route to Palm Beach. As soon as I noted that the cash customers were beginning to use each others' necks for a balcony, I closed up the box-office and dashed inside.

At the front of the trap, Professor Omar Bey was strutting up and down, stroking his artificial whiskers. He's encased in a pip of a Hindu robe, imported all the way from Hoboken, New Jersey, whilst he's got a pale-blue Punjab turban around his head that was a thing of beauty and a toy forever, or whatever it was that Jack Keats remarked.

"I guess we got some heavy sugar, hey?" he buzzes to me, soon as I reached his side. "If you're ready, les' shoot the gimmick." In English, that means, "Start the show."

Facing the audience dramatically, the professor makes a little spiel to the lads, and explains what it's all about. After annoying the air for ten minutes, he winds up with this dose of mashed apples:

"Good friends," he booms, "I don't have to tell you intelligent gentle-mun that this is a very, very dangerous exhibition. If this man fails to revive at the expiration of six days it means that he has died in the service of modern science!"

Pelican-beak gets a whiff of that bright news, and almost faints. Figuring that he might sober up suddenly, get scared, and blow out of the place, I sidle up to him pronto.

"Listen, bo," I whispers in his shell-like ear. "Never mind what the professor says about bumping you off. He couldn't hypnotize Julius Cæsar, and Jules has been rigid for centuries. Just keep up your

nerve. Why, you'll have a hell of a good time down in that hole!"

"Bettah drain down plenty of har-r-rd cider, pardner, or I may come up," he says.

The professor walks over to Pelican-beak, places him next to the wooden box, then looks him plumb in the eye.

"Sir," says the professor, "you are a brave man, indeed! I appreciate the fact that you are an honest worker in the ranks of science. However, sir, if I fail to revive you at the proper time, I now bid you farewell. But remembah, my dear sir, that you have been a martyr for humanity, and your name shall remain enscrolled forever in the halls of everlasting fame. Sir, I salute you!"

I didn't figure that Ballyhoo was gonna work so strong, and so I edge up and buzz, "Lay off that tripe! This guy may be well-stewed, but he's getting white in the face. The dizzy boob is liable to believe what you say and run out on the act!"

"Forget it!" he buzzes back. "The lad is lubricated with sweet spirits of fermenti, and he don't care what happens." Turning swiftly to the audience, he resumes, "Lay-dees and gentle-mun, I now proceed to place this man in a state of rigid hypnosis."

First, he waves a flock of magic passes over Pelican-beak's face, while at the same time he mumbles a sour mixture of Patagonian, Hindustani, Hottentot, Dutch, and Circus-hokum.

"You are losing consciousness!" he raves. "Soon you shall enter into the Kingdom Beyond! Sleep! Sleep! Sleep! Rest! Rest! Rest! I command you to obey my will!"

At this point Pelican-beak had been rehearsed to look goofy, slowly lower his head, and then drop into my waiting arms. However, Pelican-beak's mind—if any—must have been centered on future Bacchanalian sprees. Instead of collapsing pronto, the big ape wiggles his nose, blinks, and looks up innocently at the hay mow.

"Snap into, you flatfoot!" hisses the professor, in an undertone. "If you ruin this act I'll bury you in earnest!"

"Huh?" mumbles Pelican-beak. " 'Smatter?"

"Sleep! Rest! (Drop dead, you sap!) Enter the arms of Morpheus! (Oh, wait till I get you alone!) You are now leaving the earth! (Fall over, you tramp, or I'll brain you!) You are approaching the land of dreams! Sleep! Sleep! (Topple over, you dizzy clown, and do it now!) The land of Nod is near! The earth is passing away! Sleep, rest, sleep! (Collapse backwards, stupid! Can't you hear me?) Ah, the subject, lay-dees and gentle-mun, has succumbed to the hypnotic eye!"

He fell into my arms, but not from any hypnotic eye. I gave him a snappy sock in the ribs, and saved the act.

"Good work, Doc!" whispers the professor. "A moment more, and it would have been a farce. He must be extry cider'd—I couldn't make him obey."

We arrange Pelican-beak neatly in the wooden box, whilst an awed silence reigns among the cash customers.

"Gentle-mun," announces Professor Omar Bey, "our subject is now in a perfect state of rigidity. He hears not, he sees not, he feels not. I shall proceed, with the aid of my trained assistant, to place the man in the bowels of the earth, where he shall remain for six days and six nights. During this period, no food or water shall pass his lips!"

We speedily nail the cover on the box, dump Pelican-beak in the hole, and then attach the peek-a-boo shaft, through which the patrons may look down and see the sleeping cutey. That accomplished, the professor invites the audience to file by and take a peek at the subject. We have strung a flashlight in the coffin, which illuminates the head and shoulders, and when I took a peek down the shaft I had to admit that Pelican-beak sure looks like a tasty treat for the embalmer! Honest, he sure seems weird.

"Now," whispers the professor, "if the sucker only keeps still, we'll get away with some important money. Things look bright, hey?"

FOR the next half hour assorted cowboys, ranchers, and maybe bandits, filed up, took a peek down the shaft, and walked on. Whilst they were admiring Pelican-beak, the professor announced to one and all that the exhibition would last all the week, and that the folks could come in every day—at two-bits a head—and see how the subject was progressing. The doors would be open to the public

from 3 P. M. to 9 P. M. On the following Saturday, the lad would be exhumed, and revived in full view of the audience, the price of admission for the revival being four-bits, instead of two.

When the folks had all departed, the professor takes a look down the peep-hole.

"Great!" enthuses Ballyhoo, "the son-of-a-gun is snoring! An ideal subject!"

"Wake 'im up," I suggests, "maybe he's hungry."

"Hey, bo!" shouts the professor, down the shaft, "don't you wanna come up?"

Answer—snores.

"The lad is a prime sleeper," says the professor. "Gosh, I wonder if I hypnotized him in earnest? Maybe I'm a hypnotist and don't know it!"

"And maybe I'm the Prince of Wales, and don't know it," I retorts. "You couldn't hypnotize sick shads, and what's more, you know it!"

"Be that as it may, is, or should be, I move that we wake this lad up."

"Go ahead. But I'll bet you'll shout your brains out before he stirs."

"Watch me," he assures. He selects a small stone, and drops it down the shaft. It socks Pelican-beak right in the middle of the whiskers.

"Huh?" he grunts, blinking.

"Wake up!" shouts the professor. "The customers have gone, and you don't have to stay down there."

"Lemme alone," mumbles the lad. "This place is shore comfortable. Les' sleep a coupla hours, then I might get up. Mean-w'ile, get me a jug of har-r-rd cider."

Leaving Pelican-beak to his dreams, we go to town, get a supply of grub, have a bite, then pile up in the hay loft and take a sleep ourselves. When we awoke, it was around twilight, but our subject was still pounding his ear. So we remove the earth, exhume Pelican-beak, and supply him with food and har-r-rd cider.

Well, to come to the end of a perfect fray, everything goes along great during the next two days, with the subject causing us next to no worry or trouble at all. So long as we keep him damp with cider, he obeys our orders like a trained dog. We have made up our minds to give him a twenty per cent cut-in on the gross receipts, but when we mention that to him he just yawns, and returns to his snoring. An odd beezark, and I don't mean perhaps!

Everything goes along pat until high-noon Saturday, three hours before we're due to revive the subject in front of the crowd. During the week, of course, we are obliged to keep Pelican-beak concealed in the barn; if any of the cow-bangers happened to see him along the main drag —blooey for us! A guy who is supposed to be asleep in the deep, dead to the world, wouldst look kinda peculiar walking around town, wouldn't he? I suggest he would! But I don't mean to say that our jovial playmate made any attempt to walk down the main street. What he did do, however, was almost as raw.

Saturday morning, me and the professor had strolled around the burg, and got back to the show about 12 o'clock. As we entered, the first thing we pike is a strange-looking bird, sitting on the coffin.

"Who in Gehenna is that bimbo?" buzzes the professor, grabbing my arm.

"Ask me another!" I says. "This lad is wearing Pelican-beak's clothes, but he sure ain't wearing his face!"

We both rush to the front, and the lad looks up. When he does, I recognize the biggest nose ever born to breathe. In short, the lad is Pelican-beak, all right, but please get this:

*The dizzy boob has shaved off every whisker on his pan!*

"Howdy, gents," he says. "I bet you didn't recognize me, huh?"

"I'll also bet yo're crazy!" snaps the professor, fit to be tied. "How in hell will the audience take a joke like that? You're supposed to be hypnotized, buried alive, and dead to the world for six days and nights! Maybe some of 'em would like to know how a guy in your condition could shave himself! I *could* tell 'em that I sent a barber down the shaft to wipe a razor over your mug, but any barber who could get through *that* shaft would have to be a eel. I've a good mind to knock you loose from your socks!"

"Yeah," I adds, sorer than a whole family of bunions, "what a fine bust *you* turned out to be! You've crimped the whole act, and I ought to knock your block off at the Adam's apple!"

"I'm shore pained, pardners," he drawls. "I just plum forgot about that whiskers part. They begin to itch, so I just chase 'em off. But maybe it's aw right, anyways. Y'see, I have decided not to go

down that air hole any more, no how. Come to think of it, I musta been a bit under the weather, or I wouldn't of even started no sich nonsense. So if it's all the same to you, I'll just go about my business."

"Just try and do it!" yelps the professor. "D'yer think we're gonna let you walk out on the act on the big day, and maybe lose five hundred bucks? Nothing doing, Big Boy! If you're aiming to bluff us so's we'll slip you more dough for your bit—well, maybe we'll listen to reason. But one thing is certain, cul—you leave this joint over my dead body!"

A steely-glint appears in Pelican-beak's eyes, and he looks as cold as a polar bear's nose.

"Talk easy, pardner," he says slowly. "I ain't useter to being dictated to by any dude wranglers. I says I was about to vamoose, and I aim to do exactly that."

"Try it!" whoops the professor. "I just ask you to try it!"

I'm about to add my own seething oration to the professor's, when I suddenly change my mind. In different words, Mons. Pelican-beak whips out a glittering six gun, and aims it at the professor's misshaped head.

"I guess yuh didn't hear me," reminds the lad. "I remarked that I was leavin' these here pastures, and it won't make you happy to stop me."

Before either me or the professor could get over the shock, the barn door snaps open, and in blows a posse of four armed men. Pelican-beak takes a quick look at the intruders, and drops speedily behind the coffin, and is about to pick off the leader, when a gun barks, and the pistol flies out of Pelican-beak's hand.

"In the name of the law and Sage County," rasps the leader, "I arrest you, 'Cock-eyed' Perkins!"

Well, you could of knocked me over with a brick! Cock-eyed Perkins? Where did we see that name before?

"I'm Sheriff Jim Riley, of Sage County," goes on the business-like hombre, addressing me and the professor. "I happened to witness this fake exhibition the other night, and when I looked down the hole I thought the subject looked a bit familiar. I admit the whiskers fooled me a bit, but now that I see him with a clean shave, I know I've got my man."

"Sheriff," beams the professor, "I congratulate you! However, you're a bit late on the job. You see, brother, me and my partner knew who our subject was all the time, and we was just waiting for a chance to get in touch with you. Er, that two thousand smackers reward will come in handy!"

Speaking of fairy tales, the professor is a speedy thinker, eh?

"So you knew all about 'im, did you?" cooes the sheriff, in a voice loaded with sarcasm. "Well, maybe you did, young feller, my lad; but what in hell was the idea of holding him for a week? As a matter of fact, you didn't know whether he was Cock-eyed Perkins or John L. Sullivan. Meanwhile, the reward will remain with the county. Come on, Perkins; you're wanted for everything but burning down hospitals!"

With the genial bandit neatly handcuffed, the posse blows out—leaving me and the professor holding the bag.

"Just what," I asks, "do you think of that?"

"Ask me another!" snorts Ballyhoo Burns.

*Part Four*

# *The Dangerous Isles*

## *A Romance of the South Seas' Enchantment*

*By* BASIL CAREY

***Preceding events briefly retold***

For three days Morgan and Pettigrew, partners in a pearling expedition, had awaited the arrival of their other partner, Donovan, in his boat the *Spindrift*. They had sailed in the *Anna* to pick up divers and here, southeast of Amanu, Donovan was to have joined them with the stores and a chart of the island Taukura. Donovan had stumbled upon this island accidentally, found it had never been pearled, and made a chart showing its location and approach among the Dangerous Isles of the Southern Pacific.

Growing impatient at Donovan's tardiness, and each secretly worried because of it, they put about and made for Wakatea, the port where Donovan took on stores, hoping to pick him up on the way. They find his boat scuttled but kept awash by a ledge on which it had drifted. Donovan is in the deckhouse, knifed, a gold earring in his fingers. The chart is gone.

Pettigrew admits to Morgan that while last at Wakatea he mentioned he was going pearling on Taukura with Donovan. He had babbled this information while in his cups. They both feel sure that the only ones capable of attacking Donovan and stealing the chart are Stewart and his partner Lamotte—the latter they remember wears earrings much like that found clutched in Donovan's hand.

They go to Wakatea and get fresh supplies. Here their suspicions of Stewart are further confirmed. They find he sailed immediately after Donovan did and that he knew Donovan had a chart of Taukura. They also learn that Stewart and Lamotte headed for Kikia where they were to meet the latter's sister who was to arrive on the Tahiti mail boat. Morgan and Pettigrew sail with all haste to intercept Stewart. They arrive at Kikia and demand an explanation from Stewart but get no satisfaction. Lamotte, however, is plainly nervous and has a torn ear, which he claims to have received in a fight. With so little evidence they cannot drag Stewart and Lamotte into court, but plan to follow them. If Stewart goes to Taukura it will show them the way—which they cannot find without Donovan's chart—and also prove that Stewart has the chart. Thus they hope to find the secret pearling ground and Donovan's murderer at the same time.

Stewart, fearing this, has a native waylay Morgan and Pettigrew and keep them doped for two days after he, Lamotte, and Lamotte's sister, Valerie, have sailed.

Valerie is fresh from New York and knows nothing of Stewart nor of her brother's participation in any wrong doing.

Stewart, Lamotte and Valerie, with Donovan's chart, reach Taukura unhindered by Morgan and Pettigrew. After a week's fishing they leave with some very fine pearls. Stewart has paid Valerie much attention and she is attracted by him.

Morgan and Pettigrew, feeling certain that Stewart will sell any pearls he may get at Taukura to Chang, lay off Paviete to intercept the *Swallow*. They finally sight her and make a night attack, boarding the *Swallow* from their longboat. During the confused fighting Pettigrew steals below and finds Valerie with Stewart's belt, containing the pearls, about her. They squabble, the light is knocked down and Valerie finally gets to the deck where Pettigrew catches her. Unable to unclasp the complicated buckle

of the belt and afraid of interference by others, Pettigrew grabs her and jumps overboard. They are picked up by Morgan in the longboat and taken on board the *Anna*. The pearls are taken from Valerie and the *Anna* heads northward for Kikia where they intend to put Valerie ashore. During the fight the *Swallow's* steering gear was put out of commission so Morgan and Pettigrew feel safe from pursuit.

A squall hits the *Anna*, before they can take in sail or cut the halyards she is demasted. Some of the crew are washed overboard—Pettigrew is nowhere to be seen—the boat appears to be sinking. Morgan takes Valerie and puts out in the longboat.

The rising sun finds them both huddled in the bottom of the boat.

Farther north a fantastic hulk pitches and rolls alarmingly, wringing heartfelt curses from her steersman.

After drifting two days in the longboat Morgan and Valerie sight Paviete. They swim ashore landing on the seaward side of the island.

While the castaways are crossing Paviete to reach the harbor side where Chang lives, Stewart and Lamotte have paid Chang a brief visit to mend their steering gear. They inform him of the disappearance of Valerie and the pearls. They leave Paviete to try to find the *Anna* and recover the pearls, promising Chang to return with the pearls and sell them to him.

Morgan and Valerie reach Chang shortly after Stewart's departure. The Oriental receives them with all courtesy, but during their first night under his roof robs Morgan of the pearls. Morgan accuses him of the theft and starts a fight. Chang's servants overcome Morgan and lock him up. Valerie is left unharmed as a plaything for Chang.

Ah Foo, a servant of Chang's secretly hates his master and on Morgan's arrival has surreptitiously sent a native catamaran to overtake Stewart with the news. Because of the light breeze the natives catch up with the *Swallow* and Stewart turns back toward Paviete, to recapture the pearls and Valerie.

## CHAPTER XIII

CHANG sat in his great carved chair that had dragons' heads for the arms. His fat body was covered with new robes of finest silk, embroidered with gold thread, worked in a pattern of peach blossom and fuchsias. He had been burning joss-sticks and the heavy odor hung about the room. The schooner from Tahiti was expected at any hour. Through the hot drowse of mid-afternoon came the sound of preparations for a festive night. The arrival of a ship from the outside world was an event celebrated by the entire population.

In an outer room Ah Foo was busy with accounts. Under his thin clever fingers the

rapid brush moved with deft strokes. In the midst of his calculations he paused, and peered into the dimness of the room where Chang sat. Only the flutter of the ivory fan proclaimed that his master was awake.

Another hour passed before Chang's voice cut across the silence. He was speaking in English and Ah Foo, whose knowledge of that language was limited, frowned. He stole across to the door and glanced furtively out to sea. Then with a sigh he returned to his work, stopping now and again as he caught a word here and there from the drone of voices in the other room.

"Why should I tell you where he is?" Chang was saying.

"Of course you won't," retorted Valerie. "Only—only I'd like to know whether you've—whether he's still alive."

She was sitting bolt upright on a crimson cushion. Under her eyes were dark shadows that told of sleepless hours. She dared not close her eyes. Every time the lids drooped, fear pricked them open again. It was the day after Morgan had been overpowered and hauled away by the grunting Kanakas —where? She did not know whether he were dead or alive. The uncertainty was the worst trial she had ever borne. Chang knew it. He gloated over the hacking anxiety that was slowly sapping her defences. He looked at her often, and his glance was the glance of a man anticipative of a rare and subtle pleasure. He was impatient, yet with the instinct of the true epicure, he determined to wait until after the visit of the Tahiti schooner. Then, when there was no fear of interruption, when the long lazy days and nights were his own . . . Unconsciously his tongue flickered over his dry lips. Valerie shuddered. For the first time in her life she was face to face with stark fear—fear that crouched at her feet, waiting to spring. She had been scared in the longboat when she and Morgan baled for dear life. She had been terrified in the midst of the Haunted Valley. But never before had she stood alone and battled with this cold sick feeling that was crushing the life out of her.

She had tried to pray, but the only words that would come to her lips were "Oh, God . . . oh, God . . ." She was too appalled to think connectedly. All her being was absorbed in the one fruitless question: How long? Her mind kept darting away, raking up little trivial incidents of long ago, as the mind of a drowning man will do. She found herself repeating some childish rhyme that she had recited at her first party. She remembered the frock she had worn, white muslin and a pink sash. A sash . . . Chang was wearing a sash. It moved slightly every time he breathed. At one place something made a slight bulge under the silk. A gun? More likely a knife. She moved uneasily. At the faint sound that she made, the slanting eyes fastened on her.

"Are you hungry?" inquired Chang.

"No."

"Do not be afraid that the food is poisoned or drugged. It is not. Nor will it be—yet."

A smile slid across his yellow face. At his words, panic swept over Valerie. She leaped to her feet and fled wildly across the room, through the open door. She knew it was useless, worse than useless. But the instinct of the trapped animal to escape was too strong. Before the mad venture began she knew how it must end. As she stumbled over the threshold a lean hand shot out and gripped her ankle. She fell, writhing in the stubborn clutch of claw-like fingers. She screamed once, the pitiful scream of the doomed thing as the snare closes. Then her voice ebbed away into a strangled moaning that threatened to choke her. Ah Foo hauled her into the inner room and laid her down before his master. In the midst of her terror the thought flashed through Val's mind that he was like a dog bringing home a rabbit. She wanted to laugh at the grotesque simile. Then she saw Chang's face and the sight crushed the hysterical impulse in an instant.

Ah Foo stood waiting, until Chang waved him away. He bowed and went out.

"Why did you do that?" asked the lazy voice. He had not moved, nor turned his head, so sure was he of Ah Foo's vigilance. "Do not try it again. It is useless, all useless. Why should you seek to leave my poor house? Everything that is in it is at your honorable feet. I myself am there, a humble and unworthy worshipper of your beauty."

He gazed at her ruminatively.

"Why do you struggle against Fate? What is decreed, must be. We of the Old World know it. Everything is foreseen. Everything is inevitable. It is only the younger nations who will not admit it. We of the East are wiser. We turn our backs

to the winds of fate. So the storm passes over us. . . . But the Western people face the tempest, striving in vain to fight through it, only to be crushed, blinded, overcome in the midst of their struggles. The Englishman calls it civilization. The American calls it progress. The Oriental, who knows the secret of the world, calls it folly."

VALERIE was not listening. Dimly she was aware that he was speaking, but the words fled past her ears in a meaningless jumble. The oppressive stillness of the air overpowered her. She felt that soon she must give way to the tortures of weariness that possessed her. The suspense was sapping her strength. When—when—when would those fat yellow hands reach out toward her? She could feel her flesh quivering at thought of the bloated face pressed close to hers. In vain she struggled to escape from the vision of the huge flabby body. Look where she would, she still saw the sensual lips, the sly, peering eyes.

Desperately she looked round the low room, seeking for means of escape. The open door taunted her with its futile promise of freedom. The barred window, looking toward the sea, gave no hope. What had Chang said just now about the inevitable? What had Morgan told her, hours, centuries before? "Death won't be pleasant; but it'll be preferable." She knew why Chang's wily mind had devised this subtle prelude. He had the instincts of a tiger-cat, the hint of felinity that characterizes the men of his race. He gloated over this torture of her spirit, as he would presently gloat over the torture of her body.

Her mind, wandering dazedly from one thing to another, stopped before Ah Foo. Was it any use appealing to him? Suppose she were to beg him to help her, what would he do? The pain in her ankle where his fingers had gripped it suggested what he would probably do. Plainly there was no help to be expected from him. Surely there must be a woman somewhere who would help her—some almond-eyed yellow woman, resentful of her attraction for Chang? She knew there were Chinese women in the low building on the other side of the rough courtyard. Sitting in the motionless heat she had caught the quick patter of feminine feet, shod feet whose heels made a clattering noise, unlike the bare, catlike tread of the native women. Once there had come the echo of a thrilling laugh, checked in mid course as though someone had held up a warning hand.

"It is no use," said Chang, reading the thoughts that passed feverishly through her troubled mind. "There is no one who cares what becomes of you. You are hoping for pity. Yes, I can see it in your eyes."

"Pity from a Chink?" inquired Val disgustedly. Some obscure instinct awoke, prodding at her bewildered brain with warning fingers. It would be fatal to allow Chang to suppose that she was afraid. She nerved herself to abandon the despairing lethargy into which she had fallen. Words came rushing to her lips in an angry torrent. A tinge of color crept into her white face.

"Pity from a Chink!" she repeated, recklessly. "No, I'm not expecting that. I might hope for it from a man, but not from you. You're not real. You're a bad dream that's come true. You fat yellow beast! You've been talking a lot of tosh about your nation and its wisdom. There's one thing you haven't learned—bravery. You're a coward. Why did you have Morgan taken away? Because you were afraid, afraid, afraid."

Chang looked away with superb indifference.

"It is you who are afraid," he told her.

Her little spurt of daring flickered out. She sank back, spent by the effort.

Then something happened.

Chang was looking intently out to sea. The bars of the narrow window obscured his gaze and he came and stood close in front of them, peering out. He was so close to the crouching girl that his robe brushed against her as he passed.

For some moments he stood there, intent on what he saw. Valerie, watching covertly, saw his face change. He clapped his hands sharply and Ah Foo came running. Chang pointed across the sea and Ah Foo looked obediently. For a moment master and man gazed at each other in something like dismay. Then as if by common consent, they hurried out in silence, locking the door after them.

Outside, Chang was the first to speak.

"That is not the schooner."

Ah Foo bowed.

"The honorable Chang speaks wisdom. It seems to this person that the approaching

ship is one which came here not many days since."

"It may be so," agreed Chang. "And can you tell me why this thing should happen? If Stewart should return, it would seem that he has some reason for doing so."

"Undoubtedly."

"Yet it is impossible that he should be aware of the presence of the outcast Morgan, who is at this moment confined in a hut of small dimensions."

He fixed his keen eyes on the other.

"The key to the mystery lies in someone's hands. Sooner or later it will be inserted in the lock. What is left for us to do, except to listen for the sound of creaking hinges as the door opens?"

The Kanakas, curious and puzzled, crept near, looking from their master to the approaching ship. Behind them stood the Chinese coolies whom Chang had brought with him from Wei-hi-wei. Their expressionless faces betrayed nothing. They looked on stolidly, contemptuous of the chattering crowd. They had lived on Paviete long enough to be surprised by nothing. Between them and the darker race there existed a bitter hostility. They bullied the Kanakas whenever they had a chance, knowing themselves inviolate. In earlier days a Chinese coolie had been found dead one morning on the beach. With much excited gesticulation, every Kanaka on the island protested his innocence. Chang listened. He listened for so long that presently an uneasy silence fell on the voluble crowd. He asked no questions. But presently he raised his hand and pointed, first at one man and then at another. The accusing finger moved surely, swiftly. Thirty-eight times had the dead man seen the spring, and thirty-eight Kanakas saw the sun rise for the last time on the day after he died. Chang killed them in a picturesque and spectacular manner, and henceforth the coolies were as gods to the islanders.

On and on came the *Swallow*. By and by figures could be discerned. A thought struck Chang. He spoke to Ah Foo, and that worthy padded away to the house. Unlocking the door of the room where Valerie waited in terrified silence he slid inside and left the door open. Crossing the floor he sidled up to her. She watched him mutely. He beckoned meaningly. She shook her head. Where did he want her to go? She had seen a ship in the distance and supposed it to be the one that Chang was expecting. Her eyes, unaccustomed to notice the cut of a ship, had been unable to recognize the *Swallow* so far away. Vague thoughts of escape were flitting through her mind. Ah Foo beckoned again. When she still refused to move, he eyed her calculatingly for a moment. Then he sprang forward, seized her by the waist, and slung her deftly across his shoulders. Heedless of her struggles he ran with her through the open door, across an open space, into a low building roofed with coarse grass. She had a swift vision of two Chinese women open-mouthed against the wall. One of them was wearing a wide-sleeved coat of bright blue silk. They watched eagerly as Ah Foo hurried past and entered the room beyond. In a moment he came back, alone.

STEWART strode up the beach. Behind him came Lamotte, sullen, watchful of the least movement among the curious gaping throng. Chang did not go to meet them. He stood waiting for them. By him stood Ah Foo, exultant and yet afraid. If Chang should find out where Stewart got his information, it would go hard with the informer.

"We've come back," Stewart was saying. "You know why."

Chang shrugged his shoulders.

"My humble understanding cannot conceive a reason for your return."

The two faced each other. The enmity that had lain hidden showed itself plainly at last. Chang preserved his impassive calm, but Stewart had been jerked out of his suavity.

"If you will enter my miserable abode," said Chang, "we can confer on the matter."

He turned his back on them and led the way. Not till they were inside the room, where the jade Buddha was, did he look at them again. He made a sign and Ah Foo went and stood by the door. It was late afternoon. Before long it would be dark. In Chang's swift brain a plan had already formed.

"Where's Morgan?" said Stewart abruptly.

"The illustrious Morgan? How should this person know?" returned Chang blandly. "Am I omnipotent to know the whereabouts of every thief in the Islands?"

"Is he here?"

"Why should he be on Paviete?"

"Is he here, damn you?"

"I have not scoured the island," retorted Chang. "Is it your pleasure that I do so?"

"Where is he?" insisted the other. "He's here. I know it. Where is he?" He came closer, thrusting his white face toward Chang. "And where are the pearls?"

Chang closed his eyes and shook his head wearily. In that fraction of a moment Ah Foo made a slight movement. It told Stewart what he wanted to know.

"You are mad," came the droning voice. "Yes, the curse of the gods has descended on you. You speak foolishness. What does Confucius say? 'The man who—' "

"Cut it out." Stewart's savage voice ripped across the languid tones. "Cut it right out, Chang. You're not bluffing me any this time. You've got the pearls. I know it, you swine, don't you try to double-cross me. No man's done that yet and got away with it."

Long shadows crept about the room. The red-hot sun lay low on the horizon. Black against the sky stood the palms, waving in the evening breeze. Soon it would be dark.

"Pearls?" murmured Chang vaguely.

"Pearls," repeated Stewart grimly. "Don't try it on, Chang. It's no use. We've had a good few deals together, and I know you. You can't get away with it. It's no use. I'm going to have them. Hand 'em over."

"How shall—"

"Don't say you haven't got them. You liar, you're carrying them now. Give them up. Give them up, I say."

Chang smiled insolently.

"Do you threaten force? I can answer you with greater."

Stewart was quivering with passion. His lips were set in a thin hard line. His hand stole to his belt.

"If you shoot," remarked Chang with indifference, "the entire populace will arrive with the swiftness of hawks, and you will be torn limb from limb. I mention this in passing. Do not let it deter you."

The minutes passed. The room grew shadowy in the swift-coming darkness. Alone, above them all the jade figure stood out, immutable, eternal. Lamotte moved restlessly. Covertly his uneasy eyes searched the shadows for something that might lurk there. He was standing close to Stewart and suddenly he felt him stiffen. He knew what it meant. The next moment Stewart had hurled himself against the Chinaman. At the impact Chang staggered back, taken unawares. In an instant he had recovered himself. His knife sprang to his fingers. In his own tongue he shouted one word to Ah Foo, "Sound!"

But Ah Foo did not strike the great gong which would have brought men running to the aid of their master. He stood motionless, his crossed arms tucked into his wide sleeves, his flickering eyes half shut. The white Buddha was not more motionless than he. Unmoved he watched the combat that raged in the dim room. He heard the choking cry that told him Chang had realized that there were three enemies in the room.

Stewart, his iron fists pounding into the huge body, heard it too. His hands slithered on the slippery silk. He was panting, uttering little guttural noises of excitement. He was obsessed by one single idea, to pound that yellow face into insensibility. To do this, to have his way, he must disarm Chang. That knife that gleamed in the dusk. He made a sudden leap for the thing as it hovered above his head. Heedless of the sledge hammer blows that rained about his head, he bent all his energy to the accomplishment of his purpose. Back and back went the hand that strove in vain to stab. In the flabby yellow body were reserves of strength at which he had never guessed. The close-gripped fingers refused to yield. The blade grazed his arm and he felt the start of the warm blood. At last his tearing hands found Chang's thumb, pressed vice-like against the haft. If he could break it. . . . He heard Chang's sharp breath. Heedless of the clenched fist that thrashed at him like a flail, he gave a sudden sharp jerk that wrenched the resisting thumb sideways and then obliquely upward. The joint snapped with a faint sound, and he felt the flesh sagging against his hand. A moment, and he had forced the writhing fingers to loosen their hold. The knife crashed to the floor. Lamotte kicked it clear. It shot across the room to Ah Foo's feet.

HAMPERED by his injured hand, Chang fought blindly, desperately. His blows carried immense weight, and Stewart's head was ringing painfully. Now that the knife had gone, he could act

on the offensive. He knew from the sign that Ah Foo had made that Chang carried the pearls on his body. But where? A too hasty thrust with his own knife might ruin everything. There remained one place where he might strike with safety, the throat. In the increasing darkness, he nerved himself for a supreme effort. He tried a fall, thrusting his leg between Chang's straining knees, bearing him down with all his strength. Locked together, they lurched unsteadily, swaying like two drunkards in a tipsy embrace.

Ah Foo lit a lantern, a flimsy thing that he held high above his head. In its fantastic light the two caught sight of each other's faces, blanched, wolfish. Chang's lips were caught back in a snarl that laid bare his teeth. He was taller than his adversary, powerfully built, formidable in spite of his age. It seemed doubtful to the breathless watchers to whom the victory would fall. Chang staggered slightly. Stewart seized his chance and threw all his weight forward.

As Chang fell, Stewart leaped to his throat. His fingers buried themselves in the soft-flesh, choking the prostrate man, pressing the life out of him. Vainly Chang's one sound hand sought his adversary's eyes. Stewart jerked his head out of reach of the clawing fingers. The seconds went by and soon the lifted hand clutched the air in agony. The dying eyes gazed, unseeing, at Ah Foo, so still there with the lantern held high, at Lamotte, white-faced in the shadow. The grip of Stewart's hands never relaxed. So long did he stay there, astride the body, that Lamotte waved Ah Foo forward. By the dim lantern light they saw that Chang was dead. They drew the conqueror away, and he rose shakily, leaning against Lamotte for support, gazing stupidly at his reddened hands. Suddenly he flung himself on his knees, tearing at the silken clothes, ripping the fine stuff in his eagerness. Layer on layer he tore away, until he found what he sought, a square packet tucked away in a fold of clothing just above the heart. With an inarticulate cry he seized it, knowing it for what it was.

"The damn swine, thought he'd do me." The words spat out between his bruised lips. "Well, I—I did him. Did him in."

He fell silent. For a space they all three stood there contemplating Stewart's work. Chang had died hard. He who had held the lives of others so cheap had not parted easily with his own. To Lamotte there was something pitiful in the swollen bloated face, and the staring eyes that stared straight into his own. Almost unconsciously he crossed himself and muttered words that brought Stewart's insolent glance of inquiry. He stopped abruptly, flushing before the other's lifted eyebrows.

The ringing in Stewart's head was dying away. The room ceased to whirl round him and he was at leisure to regard his handiwork. He was conscious of only one feeling—exultation at the death of the man who had tried to thwart him. With his own hands he had killed him—killed Chang, the terror of the outer islands, the man who feared nothing in the world, not even the consequences of his own acts. How many men had been avenged this night? Idly Stewart asked himself the question, his thoughts caught back to memories of the evil yellow face looking into his, while they two discussed plans and schemes that had been born in that cunning brain.

Ah Foo set the lantern on the floor and busied himself in the outer room. Stewart found himself trembling violently. Reaction had set in swiftly, and he swayed as though he would fall. Lamotte caught and held him until Ah Foo came back bringing whisky. They had to hold it to his lips. His shaking fingers refused to twist themselves around the glass. As he drank, his wits collected themselves once more. He laughed when he saw the empty glass.

"Satisfied, eh?" Lamotte asked him.

"Yes. I warned him. I warned him he wouldn't get away with it."

He stood up.

"Let's see if they're all right."

He brought out the packet that he had killed Chang to get, and surveyed it closely. With great care he unwrapped it, touching it as little as possible.

"Just as well to take care," he said, as he caught Lamotte's eye. "I've known him use poisoned string before now. Not likely to use it on anything he carried himself. He did once, though. He let a man rob him and the man died. No one ever robbed him again."

He spread open the last wrapper, and exposed the gleaming pearls. There in all its beauty lay the pearl of pearls, the Queen of Taukura. As he held the precious things in hands where the blood still lay wet, his heart beat fast. For this fragment of beauty a

man's life had been poured out. For this he had flung his own life into the hazard. He looked up and saw the eyes of the other men fixed on his treasure.

"Of course we'll share," he said quickly. "You'll be all right, Ah Foo. Savvy? You all right, get plenty muchee dollar."

Ah Foo nodded. He picked up the lantern and turned to the door. And he passed the body of his master he spat on it contemptuously. Without another backward glance he led the way into the outer room, his lantern bobbing up and down as he walked. The other two followed him. Lamotte came last and shut the door carefully. Across the open space they went, Ah Foo padding on in front. On the night wind came the tinkling sound of the windbells mingled with the faint splash of the fountain and the distant roaring of the sea. At last the lantern stopped before a low door. Ah Foo drew the bolts and slid it gently aside. With a wave of his hand he invited Stewart to enter.

Standing on the threshold they peered into the room.

"Valerie!"

## CHAPTER XIV

BUT it was not the Valerie they had known. The laughing girl they remembered had gone, and in her place stood a white-faced woman. She swayed to her feet as they entered the room. Lamotte caught her in his arms and held her close.

"Valerie!" he said over and over again. "My little sister!"

Presently he put her down, and looked at her anxiously.

"You have not been hurt? You are all right?"

"I'm all right," said Valerie mechanically. "We've had a bad time, but no one's hurt me."

Already the shock of relief was subsiding, and in its place was rising a tide of strange emotion at the sight of Stewart. Was this the man who had awakened the woman in her on that night, centuries before, when he had snatched those burning kisses? She looked at him again, saw his blood-stained hands, his swollen discolored face. A sudden revulsion came over her. She thought: "It oughtn't to matter what he looks like. It doesn't really alter him. It—it doesn't matter." But it did. Impossible to delude herself on that point.

With the dullness of one who has suffered much, she had no curiosity as to why they had come to Paviete. They were there, and they would save her from Chang. So much her flagging brain could grasp and rejoice over. Now at last she would be able to sleep. Sleep! When had she closed her eyes last? She remembered waking out of a troubled dream to find Morgan staring at a belt which lay on the floor. A day and a night and a day, then. What was Ah Foo doing there? And where was Chang? The light shone on Stewart's hands and she shuddered. Lamotte was talking quickly, explaining why they had come back. In a dream she heard his voice without catching the sense of his words. All her mind was occupied with Stewart. So this was the man that she had defended against Morgan's bitter indictment. It seemed strange that never before had she seen the cruelty which showed in his lips, his treacherous crafty eyes. Yet she had seen and refused to see. She had deceived herself, wilfully, blindly, shutting out those things which she would not admit. All the time she had known they existed. Like any raw fool in love she had cheated herself.

Lamotte set her on her feet. "You needn't be afraid any more," he told her gently. "Chang will not trouble us again."

So they had killed him then . . . Mingled with a savage joy that horrified her, was a feeling of aversion toward those who had brought about his death. It was entirely feminine and illogical. She tried to fight it down but it persisted. Need they have killed him? Surely there were other ways than the way of the knife? She pictured the old man down, fighting for his life, his ivory fan flung aside at last. Well, if it hadn't happened that way, if Stewart and Lamotte hadn't come back—she shuddered again at thought of what might have been.

"You are sorry for that devil," said Stewart abruptly. "Yes, you are. Women always have a soft spot for the loser. They can't help it."

He was looking at her intently, drinking in the beauty that was increased a hundred times by her knowledge of suffering. His pulses beat high. Frustrated desires awoke again at the sight of her. His longing for her resolved itself into an ache that was

almost physical. He dug his nails into his palms to keep his hands at his side. Too soon, toa soon, he told himself. Let him get her back on the *Swallow* where she could forget the horrors she had been through. Let him bide his time. Was it possible that he, born lover of women, should fail where this dark-eyed slip of a girl was concerned? He smiled at his fears, but he could not conquer them. He had seen her look at his hands. He had read aright the distaste that showed in her face. Yet it was natural . . . It was feminine. Any woman would have felt the same. It would pass.

"I suppose you had to kill him," she was saying slowly.

"It was the only way to reach you," he told her.

"You didn't do it for me," said Val, clearly. "You did it for the pearls."

There was a startled silence. Both men looked up in quick amazement. Why should she put her finger on the truth like that? Lamotte denied it swiftly, heatedly. The pearls! Pah, those worthless things! It had been for her, and her only, that they fought. Had Chang not died, they themselves would not be alive at that moment. On and on he went, in a flood of words. But Stewart said nothing. He was asking himself a question. Morgan . . . Morgan . . .

"Where's Morgan?" he said at last.

"I don't know."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," retorted Val. "Why should I tell you a lie?"

"When I find him," said Stewart with intention, "we'll meet for the last time. One of us will go down—and not rise up again."

He saw the quick blood leap to her face, and his heart sank.

"You've got the pearls. Why do you want to hurt Morgan?"

"You think I'm wrong, eh?"

She considered him gravely.

"Yes."

He was furious.

"I suppose he's been stuffing you up with a pack of lies, eh? And of course you believed him. He's got a smooth tongue. Women all fall for his lies. What yarn did he pitch you?"

In his anger he came nearer until his breath beat on her cheek. He stretched out his hand and caught her bare arm.

The moment that Stewart touched her, Valerie knew that she loved Morgan.

The realization was so stupendous, so overwhelming, that it shocked her into silence. A queer feeling of helpless anger swept over her, reminding her of the hatred she had felt for Morgan, the disdain she had shown him. Did she not know her own mind, then? If, an hour ago, anyone had told her she was in love with a man whom she had hated, she would have laughed the idea to scorn. But now . . .

Lamotte spoke to her, but she did not answer. Stewart repeated his question angrily, and she looked down at his hand that still held her arm. Impatiently she shook him off, as one shakes off an importunate bore. How little he mattered! And once she had fancied herself in love with him! Almost she laughed at the idea. A smile curved her lips, then faded as she saw his face darken.

"Where is he? Why are you shielding him?"

"I'm not shielding him. I don't know where he is. Yesterday there was a—a fight. They took him away. I don't know whether he's alive or dead."

Her voice quavered on the last word. Stewart's keen ears caught the tremor. Lamotte began to speak, urging haste.

"We can't stay to comb the island for Morgan. Ah Foo says the schooner from Tahiti may come in any time. We don't want to meet her. Barton carries a full crew and he was a friend of Chang's."

"No," agreed Stewart, slowly, "no, we don't want to hit that schooner. I guess old man Barton will want to let daylight into someone when he finds his source of income gone west. Come on. We'll have to hurry. We ought to get away before midnight."

He was bitterly disappointed at not meeting his enemy, but it was useless to run the chance of meeting the schooner by lingering to search for him. After all, he had got what he wanted, Valerie and the pearls. When he called Ah Foo and tried to ascertain Morgan's whereabouts, the Chinaman could only reply by vague nods and shrugs, pointing meanwhile in the direction of the hills. He had very little English, but he managed to make them understand that Morgan was imprisoned somewhere in that direction. He refused point blank to fetch him. He would not risk the journey in the

dark. In vain Stewart argued and Lamotte threatened. At the sight of a Colt thrust suddenly under his nose, a smile crossed his stolid face. He led them to the outer door and pointed in silence. Straining their eyes, they made out a pin-point of light far out at sea.

"My God, we'll only just miss her as it is," said Stewart. "Come on!"

THEY hurried down the sloping ground that led to the beach. Kaoha, anxious at their long absence, was awaiting them eagerly. All about them stirred the mystery of the tropic night. The faint wind in the ghostly palms murmured a warning. The monotonous song of the unseen waves answered. Looking back, they made out the walls of the house where Chang lay dead. No light showed. The night had clouded over, and the sky hung black and heavy as a pall. Lamotte lifted Valerie into the boat. They pushed off in silence. The last they saw of Paviete was Ah Foo, standing motionless, with his lantern held high above his head, as he had stood while Chang jerked away his life. He made no response to their farewells, but stood watching them intently, as though he saw something hidden from them. They gave it up at last and grew silent, uneasy at his immobility. The only sound as they neared the *Swallow* was the regular plash of the oars that rose and fell under the brawny arms that wielded them.

Stewart lost no time in swinging the *Swallow* out to sea. Every light was put out and the *Swallow* might have been a ghost ship as she turned northward. The lights of the oncoming schooner showed plainer, and the *Swallow* made a wide detour. They were avoiding all possible chances of recognition.

"Do you think Ah Foo will tell Barton of anything that has happened?"

"Why should he? He wants to save his own skin, doesn't he? Even if he does split, who cares? He can't prove anything."

"But he and Morgan together—" urged Lamotte, tentatively.

"Morgan? What's Morgan got to do with it? He wasn't there. He knows nothing. Probably he'll never be allowed to leave Paviete. Who can say what Chang's done to him?"

"Yoc think he's dead already?"

"Very likely," said Stewart, grimly. "Anyway, I guess we can leave him to Ah Foo."

But Ah Foo was not thinking of Morgan. For a long while he stood watching the lights of the schooner grow larger. Presently, as if he had now completed his plans, he went straight back to the house of death. The stillness that hung about it made him shiver, but he pressed on. His lantern showed a scene of desolation. Chang lay stretched in the middle of the room, his eyes wide open. His arms were flung wide in a last agony and the broken thumb of his left hand hung awkwardly. A thin line of blood showed where his throat was torn. A sharp slit in his coat showed where the pearls had once lain before Stewart's groping knife found them. For a short space Ah Foo regarded his master.

"Oh, evil one, art thou paid at last? He who killed thee will one day meet even such an end as this. Like a beast he is, that must feel the flesh of his victim under his hands, nor will use the swift messenger of death that dwells in the curved blade."

He roused himself from his contemplation and began to work feverishly. First he opened the doors of all the rooms that opened out of the main room. There were three. From there he dragged out everything, piling up all the cushions and stuffs in one vast heap about the body of Chang. Soon the dead man lay hidden, save for one outstretched hand. Ah Foo picked up the little ivory fan and thrust it between the stiffening fingers. When the pile was complete—rugs, lengths of brocaded silk, an old mantle, cushions, a discarded coat—he went away to his own quarters hard by, and returned with a jar of oil. Carefully, methodically, he saturated the inflammable things. He laid little trails of oil about the room, leading to the walls from the central mass. The door that opened seaward he set open to allow the draught to enter. It must burn well. This last revenge must be sure.

Nothing of Chang or his house must remain.

He flung the lantern on to the pile.

As the flames leaped high their garish light fell on the jade Buddha. Ah Foo caught his breath. Almost it was too late. Braving the heat he covered his mouth with his hand and made a desperate rush. Staggering beneath the load he struggled to reach the door. Once he stumbled as a tongue of

flame licked his ankle. With the sweat pouring down his face he gained the sweet air, and fell exhausted, still gripping the thing for which he had risked his life. When his breath came back in great gulps he rose painfully and dragged the god into his hut. Even as he did so, there came shouts and cries as the Kanakas hurried toward the burning house.

OLD man Barton landed on Paviete to find a mass of hysterical natives leaping about the smouldering ruins of Chang's house. He decided that the first thing to do was to clear the coast of that excited mob. To that end he fired three rounds into the empty blackness, and watched the Kanakas melt away. In less than three minutes the scene of the holocaust was deserted.

This preliminary move accomplished, he stepped forward to discover what he might about the disaster. He was a short, squat man, bearded, dark-eyed. His bluff manner passed for heartiness, and his eyes had a candid, straightforward look that was deceptive in the extreme. Many a forbidden cargo had he landed on the bleak New England coast, with the help of lean, shifty-eyed Peronne who followed him up the beach toward the fire. Behind them both hovered a white-faced no-account, Mason by name, tool and fool of every man.

"Someone's been having a joy-day," remarked Barton, "and seems to me it's not Chang."

Peronne grunted.

"Why?"

"Well, he'd hardly burn down his own house, would he? Guess we'd better get him located right away."

"We certainly had," agreed the other.

They edged nearer to the remains of the bonfire, drawn by the flickering tongues that threw an eerie light among the gaunt shadows of the palms. All around had grown deathly still. Save for the knowledge of the lurking, terrified host, they might have thought themselves alone on Paviete. Louder and louder moaned the wind in the trees; their swaying branches creaked and groaned like live things in pain. Mason, who had crept nearer the fire, cried out suddenly and turned a blanched face toward them. He stretched out a shaking hand and pointed at the smoking ruins. Peronne turned the débris with his boot, and disclosed something, blackened and burned, that could yet be distinguished as an ivory fan. It was held in what had once been a hand.

"Reckon we've located him quicker than we allowed for," said Barton grimly. "Well, I always said he'd never die in his bed. Say, you don't need to uncover any more. It's him all right. And, see here. This has been done. This wasn't any accident. How comes everything in this great lump, eh? Whoever did this wasn't taking any chances. It's queer."

"Wonder where Ah Foo is?"

"Along with Chang?"

"Not him," said Peronne with conviction. "That coyote was too slick to get his fur singed. I've always said he was a darn sight the deeper of the two. I'm going to look for him."

He set off in the darkness, while Barton continued his investigations, with Mason crouching by his side.

"Hold up the lantern," said Barton. "Lord, what a mess! This hasn't been no sewing meeting, I give you my word. See, there's been a heap made over the body. Now, that shows it ain't natural. And it shows that Chang—gee, Peronne, you startled me."

Two figures loomed out of the darkness into the garish light of the decaying fire. Ah Foo's face showed sullen and obstinate and Peronne's hand lay heavily on his shoulder.

"Well?"

Peronne was breathing heavily.

"Here he is. Found him tying bandages on his leg. I was wrong. He did get singed. And listen. He's got that white Buddha down in his hut. Now how come he to rescue that instead of Chang?"

Barton pulled Ah Foo round and stared into his face. Slowly he raised his hand and pointed to the place where they had found the charred fan.

"Chang?" he inquired.

A look of fiendish triumph slid across the celestial's face. He nodded.

"Chang," he said.

"You kill him, eh?"

Ah Foo shook his head.

"No. Stewart kill him. Plenty big fight. Chang he die."

"Stewart!" breathed Barton. "Rat Stewart! Quarreled, I suppose. Well, he always was a trouble-seeker. Ever since I give him the once-over five years ago in Tahiti, I

knew he was a trouble-seeker. Still, he didn't ought to of done Chang in this way."

An ugly look crept into his face.

"He ought to pay for it," he said. "Paviete's been a little gold-mine to us."

Roughly he shook Ah Foo till that worthy's teeth chattered.

"Where Stewart now, eh? You hide him? You savvy where Stewart is?"

"Savvy!" gasped Ah Foo.

"Where, then? Quick!"

"On boat."

"You mean he's gone? When? Just tonight?"

Ah Foo nodded.

Barton swore fiercely. He had crossed swords before with Stewart. Old enemies, these two, played off one against the other by the astute Chang. As he had said, Paviete had been a gold-mine to Barton. He and Chang had understood each other very well. Each had had a curious respect for the other's villainy. Only on the subject of Stewart they had disagreed.

It was characteristic of Barton that he wasted no regrets on a dead man.

"Well," he said at last, "Chang's gone then. And I guess wherever he is they're regretting the acquaintance already."

He turned to Peronne.

"We'll make the ship again. Ah Foo won't run away. We can leave Mason with him, if you think better. Maybe it would be wise. Quit your fooling, Mason. If you want help, fire. There'll be someone on board with skinned ears. See here. I want to look at this," he indicated the smoking ruin, "in the daylight. So I don't want no Kanakas holding a camp-meeting here before I come. Get me?"

He and Peronne went back to the *Gloria*. They took it in turns to snatch a couple of hours' rest. By dawn they were impatient to be on the island again. Not a sound had broken their rest during the night. Over the island hung a calm that was almost sinister. As the dinghy grated on the beach, they grew aware of a dark figure coming timidly toward them. It was Pelaya. He looked round cautiously before he spoke.

"Ah Foo all same liar," he said. "Ah Foo bad man, make big fire burn Chang. Tuarti kill Chang, Ah Foo make fire. Ah Foo send Pelaya in catamaran bring back Tuarti."

"Bring him back? Why?"

"Moriani come," said Pelaya, and the other two exchanged glances of bewilderment. Barton acted promptly. He sat down and began patiently to unravel Pelaya's tangled sentences. Bit by bit he pieced the story together, his keen eyes fixed on Pelaya in a hypnotic stare, pulling the truth out of him, as a man hooks a restive fish out of the sea.

MORGAN awoke with a throbbing head and a throat that resembled leather. For some time he lay quite still, trying to remember what had happened. He had a vivid recollection of Chang's ugly face close to his, and a violent blow delivered by someone unseen. Bit by bit memory came back and he pieced the story together. There had been a fight with three Kanakas, or was it four? Chang had been there and Valerie had been there. After that had come sudden oblivion.

They had overpowered him, he supposed, and carried him away to some place that they used as a prison. Becoming aware of his surroundings, he gazed round. He was in a small hut with bare plank walls, and a mud floor. It was absolutely empty, not even a pitcher of water had been left for him. High up was one small aperture, strongly barred. The wind blew in and brushed a lock of hair into his eyes. Instinctively he tried to raise his hand to move it aside. It was then that he realized that he was bound. At first his dazed senses had not grasped the fact. In his first angry bewilderment he wrenched savagely at the thongs which held him. The ensuing pain warned him that it was a fool's trick. Chang never used cord. He used very thin strands of copper wire. At the first vigorous movement the flesh would be cut. Morgan felt the warm blood trickling over his hands. His wrists had not been crossed, but placed back to back. It was impossible for his fingers to reach the wire. Yet for a time he struggled on, setting his teeth at the agony, urged on by panic. At last he was forced to desist. The fire was eating into his flesh. It felt as though it was sawing into the bone.

Weakened as he was he almost fainted. He shut his eyes on the rocking walls. Across his whirling brain shot the thought: "This is a rotten end." It had never occurred to him to think much about death. His mind was too healthy to waste time in futile speculations about the probability

of a future life. He had seen other men die, and he accepted the fact of death as one of the common things of life. Vaguely he had hoped that when his end should come, it would be a quick one. But this—

For a long time he lay almost without thought. His mind was swept clear of everything but the imminence of death. Bit by bit his panic subsided, and courage returned. He became possessed by a desperate determination. Somehow he would win through. Common sense told him it was unlikely. Stubbornly he persisted, beating down his fears one by one.

By the silence he knew that he had been taken some distance inland. There was no sound of the sea, and he felt a strange longing for the noise of the surf. The heat grew intolerable. How long he had been in the hut he could not guess. How long had he lain in a stupor? A day? Two days? They would leave him, he supposed, for about a week before they came to look at him. How long could a man hang on without food and without water? Three or four days, maybe. How long before the blood on his raw wrists would suck the poison of the copper into his veins? He shuddered at the thought.

Loneliness seized him. There was something horrible in being alone. The silence was like a thick cloak wrapping him round, stifling him. It seemed to him that somewhere near lay the Haunted Valley. The stillness of the hut had that same oppressive quality that hung over the skull shaped stones. How Val had hated him on the day that he forced her, struggling, through that accursed place! The thought of Val whipped his flagging brain into activity again. What had happened to her?

The bitter absurdity of supposing that she could escape the inevitable struck him, and he was shaken by a sudden storm of laughter—laughter that hurt his parched throat and forced the tears into his eyes. When the outburst ceased, he sat with closed eyes, while his soul plumbed depths of misery of which he had never dreamed.

When he heard voices outside the hut, he paid no attention, deeming them but phantasms of a disordered brain. Not until there came a continued knocking did he become aware that someone was actually there. He could distinguish a nasal voice that gave directions and presently there came a thud which shook the walls. They were forcing the door. If Chang had come to watch him die, why was he forcing the door? He could find no answer to the question, though he asked it aloud, over and over again, in a hoarse croak that rasped his throat. The door was yielding. It creaked ominously. Then came a short silence followed by a crash as the wood gave way, and a man sprawled head first into the stifling hut.

Morgan stared stupidly at the bearded face. The stranger picked himself up, and came quickly toward him. He felt the clink of metal against his teeth and something scorched his throat. Barton watched him keenly as he gulped it down.

"You the guy they call Moriani?"

"I'm Morgan."

"Morgan, eh? My name's Barton—Sam P. Barton of the *Gloria*."

"Where's Chang?" asked Morgan thickly.

"That's a delicate point," returned Barton with solemnity. "But I guess it's just as well he never wasted any time learning the harp."

Through the open door came the wind, bringing the scent of jasmine in its breath. Beyond the palms the sky was very blue. Three or four Kanakas were peering into the hut. Behind them stood a tall thin man chewing tobacco.

"He's—dead?"

"Yep."

"Look out," cried Peronne, "he's fainted. Lift him, that's it. Hell, look at his wrists!"

## CHAPTER XV

PETTIGREW was in Wakatea. A tramp from Auckland rolling up to the Marquesas, had sighted the *Anna* and taken her in tow. It proved a nasty job. The rope parted twice under strain of heavy seas. But the tramp skipper was a Dutchman. He had made up his mind to bring both ships into port and he did. Before the eyes of an astounded populace they came lurching into Wakatea, battered but victorious, and the Dutch skipper was fêted by the town. When the hull of the tramp disappeared to the northeast Pettigrew lay down on Marty's bed and slept for nineteen hours. At the end of that time he was awakened by a suggestive tinkling noise and opened his eyes to the sight of a tumbler of the best. Rousing himself from the tousled bed he regarded Marty speculatively.

"What day is it?"

"Wednesday. You've slept heavy. Want any grub?"

"Anything that ain't solid will do me very well," Pettigrew told him. "My stomach's too weak to digest anything yet. Well, what sort of weather have you had since we went away?"

Marty grinned.

"Fairish," he said.

Pettigrew looked round the little room. It was Marty's sanctum. Besides the bed it contained an untidy desk littered with papers, a large chest full of clothes, and an iron safe where the whisky lived. The walls were relieved from bareness by a varied assortment of pictures, cut chiefly from the *San Francisco Police News*. There were also portraits of the world's most prominent boxers in belligerent attitudes. On the side opposite the door was ranged a row of theatrical beauties, all with the same toothy smile and dressed with a scantiness that put little strain on the beholder's imagination. Pettigrew's eyes wandered to this bevy of nudity.

"Got a new girl, I see," he said, indicating a photograph at the end of the row.

"Vera Mahoney," Marty told him. "Sings a cute little song that I've got on the gramophone, 'Leave the best little bit till last' it's called. Someone shoved a colored supplement in with the last crate of sewing machines and I cut her picture out of it. Say, do you reckon she's really as high-complexioned as that?"

"Might be."

Pettigrew rose cautiously, swearing at the stiffness in his limbs. He walked up and down twice and then sat down on the bed again and stared unseeingly at the picture of Vera Mahoney. Marty watched him with anxious eyes. As yet Pettigrew had told him nothing that he wanted to know. Yet he hesitated to force the man's confidence. He had found by experience that by waiting long enough he could learn most things. So he sat patiently smoking until Pettigrew should choose to speak.

"I'll be glad when you've finished your Corona Corona," said Pettigrew. "What enemy sold you that stinkin' weed?"

"It don't stink really. It's because you're not used to tobacco-smell after your voyage. I got it off of a New York drummer who's traveling round the Islands for his health. This was a sample. It's a new brand—where's the band? Oh, yes. 'Manhattan.' Try one?"

Pettigrew shook his head.

"Voyage," he murmured. "Yes, it's been some voyage. Marty," his voice changed, "Marty, if you've heard anything of the boy, spit it out. The storm caught us in the south drift and it's not likely he'd come this way. But if they've found him—"

He stopped.

"No one's heard anything," Marty assured him. "You mean—?"

"I believe he's gone," said Pettigrew. "And if he is, we shan't see him again. The body'd get caught by the south drift and he wouldn't be likely to come this way."

"Did you see him go down?"

"No. We struck the worst gale I've been in bar the one off Penrhyn in the Manahiki Islands two years back. The *Anna* danced up and down like a bloomin' cork. I thought every minute her sides would be stove in. Morgan he worked like a slave, and so did all of us. I guess we might as well have gone below and had a hand at poker to pass the time. I tell you, I thought it was the finish. We put her up into the wind, but 'twarn't no use. Mainmast came down athwartships. That's the last thing I remember. Something must have caught me on the head. When I came to it was daylight and Tain was rubbing my feet. Poor devil, he was the only one left. We were a day and a half before the tramp overtook us. I've never been so glad to see a Dutchman before. Tain was nearly done. Kept him at the pumps. Had to. Where is he, by the way? All right, ain't he?"

"Last time I saw him he was being fed by an admiring circle of friends," said Marty. "Make your mind easy. He's taken no harm. The only thing he's likely to suffer from is swelled head."

"THE longboat was gone," Pettigrew went on. "Whether Morgan tried it or whether it was smashed in and broken up by the water I don't know. But if he did try it, he's gone. It couldn't live in that sea. Him and the girl—"

"Girl?"

"Lamotte's sister. You see, she—"

Pettigrew plunged into the story. Marty listened attentively. As the tale progressed he hid his mouth behind his hand.

"What are you grinnin' at?" demanded Pettigrew with fierceness. "There was

nothing else left for me to do. She had the pearls in that belt round her waist. I couldn't get it. Yes, I know what you're goin' to say. Have you ever tried to fight a wild cat that's gone mad? It would be a playful kitten beside that girl. I knew Stewart would be coming down if he heard her yell. There wasn't no time to think. I had to act quick. I whipped her up in my arms and ran for it. Stop me? Yes, they tried. But it was dark and half of 'em didn't rightly know what or who it was they were stopping. I jumped, and Tain heard the splash and rowed round quick. Yes, he was waiting under the bows—"

Marty listened until the tale ended. The twinkle in his eyes persisted.

"You sure are a one with the ladies," he remarked when Pettigrew drew breath. "Fancy carrying her off like that! You remind me of a yarn I read in the Christian Society's Home for Young Men when I was in Cincinnati once. Some girl called Helen it was, and she got carried off by a Frenchman—well, Paris his name was, so I suppose he was French all right—"

"How came a yarn like that in the Christian Society's Home?" inquired Pettigrew interestedly. "It don't sound much like a tract."

"They told me it was what they call a classical," Marty explained. "From what I could make out classicals are books that get read for years and years without folks getting tired of 'em. Mostly they're spicy. I guess that's why people go on reading 'em. . . . What happened to the *Swallow* do you think?"

"Damned if I know. Morgan did a little bit of fancy work on the steering gear, so I should think most likely she'd put back to Paviete for repairs."

"And the pearls?"

"They're with Morgan, wherever he is. Don't waste time talkin' about them. If it hadn't been for the cursed things he'd be here now."

"What'll you do now?"

"Get the *Anna* patched up and go back to trading," said Pettigrew gloomily. "And I'll get even with Stewart if I swing for him."

He went through the open doorway to the outer room. The store was piled high with goods. In one corner of the long low room stood the crate of sewing machines still unpacked. Close by stood a case of men's half-shoes, various sizes. A stack of tinned goods, mostly sardines, and brightly colored cans of tomatoes, made a splash of vivid color in a cool corner. On the deep shelves which ran round three sides of the room was a miscellaneous collection that included among other things brushes, soap, china vases, insect powder, gramophone records, tin kitchen-ware, blacking, photo-frames, watches, pepper, colored cotton bedspreads and hair-oil. In the center stood a counter of dark polished wood, one end of it piled high with rope-coils, the other occupied by a bolt of red twill. In the empty space before the counter were two roughly hewn tables each with three cane chairs set around.

"You can't prove he killed Donovan," Marty was saying. "He's too cute for that."

"If he hadn't killed Donovan he couldn't have found Taukura. It was the only chart there was. If he didn't get it from Donovan where did he get it?"

"I doubt whether it 'ud hold in a court of law."

"To hell with the law! It's me he'll answer to. What you want me to do? Get him jailed on suspicion and hauled up before old Dawson at Kikia? Why, Dawson's in his pocket."

"How?"

"Through that old Dago, Pereira. Pereira knows more things than any man in the Islands. Nasty cuss he is, too. It was him that stopped Morgan and me from following on the *Swallow's* heels. Kep' us drugged till Stewart was out of sight. All we could do then was to get as far south as Paviete and wait. We knew he'd come back that way. Chang would give his ears for those pearls. Know him?"

"Nope."

Pettigrew strolled out and made his way to the waterside where the *Anna* lay broken and helpless. His experienced eye saw that the repairs would take some time. He found Tain and the two of them made a tour of inspection.

Three days later the work was in full swing. Marty came down to criticize and offer valuable suggestions. Noises of hammering assaulted the ear. By the eighth day the *Anna* began to look more like herself. Pettigrew threw himself feverishly into the work. It seemed that only by physical exhaustion could he still the torments of memory. To Marty he talked

constantly of Donovan and Morgan. But to outsiders he presented a stolid front. He declined to discuss what had happened. The deep lines between his eyes grew deeper, and his lips often moved when he was alone. Tain watched him anxiously, nodding his head when he caught a muttered word here and there that related to Stewart. The days slid past until Pettigrew began to cast about to fit out a crew. He found it difficult.

"Guess I'll have to ship all Kanakas," he complained to Marty. "Don't seem as if I can look out for a partner yet. Besides, who is there?"

"There's Bill Adams," suggested Marty. "He's London born and he can navigate. He'd be willing, I should say. Eh?"

"He's no good. He was mixed up in that affair of the *Nancy*. Yes, I know it never came out, but he was. There's a yellow streak in him somewhere."

"Well, Townsend, then."

"Hell, no," said Pettigrew forcibly. "I ain't no saint, but I draw the line at a blackguard like Townsend. Most of his time he's sodden. He's lost two ships, and I've never met a man yet who'd sign on with him a second time. Savage, he is, too. I've seen him flay a boy pretty nigh to death and never turn a hair."

"Why don't you go over to Amanu? I hear Tracy's thinkin' of quitting. They did say he was selling his half-share in the *Marigold* since he had that row with his cousin."

"Row?"

"Oh, ay. Something about a woman. Anyway, he's thinking of coming out of the partnership."

"I might," agreed Pettigrew with a marked lack of enthusiasm. "If you're going out pass me the chisel. What ship is that comin' in?"

Marty wrinkled his brows and gazed across the burnished water.

"Dunno," he said. "We're not expecting anyone particular that I know of."

He went out and strolled down toward the beach. Presently the incoming schooner hove to and prepared to lower a dinghy. Marty stared harder. In silence he waited till the dinghy was beached. A man came slowly across the strip of sand toward the palms. There was a freshly healed scar on the right side of his head. Both his wrists were bandaged.

"Morgan!"

"Yes, it's me all right. Steady, you old son-of-a-gun, steady! My wrists are like raw beef."

"Where have you come from?"

"Paviete. That's Barton's boat. No, he's not stopping. Wakatea's not good for his health. Marty, that's the *Anna* lying up. Does it mean that Pettigrew—that he—"

"He's here right now. Come on and find him."

They went along the little path that led to the store. At the door they paused and Morgan peered into the dim room where Pettigrew wrestled red-faced with a chisel and a refractory case of tools that refused to be opened.

"You know," Pettigrew said without turning, "you know, I've been thinking, Marty, about Tracy. Somehow I don't fancy me and him would quite hit it off."

"Maybe there's someone here that'll do for a partner," said Marty.

Then Pettigrew looked up.

"WE'LL have to make Honolulu," said Stewart.

"Why?"

"The sooner we get unloaded of those pearls the better I'll be pleased. If we can get to 'Frisco or New York I'll feel safer."

"Safer?"

"This yarn will be all over the Islands in a week or two. Do you think Ah Foo will hold his tongue? He'll spill a lot of fool talk to old Barton when the Tahiti schooner comes in. Oh, yes, he will. He's only run with us to get his own ends. He's been wanting to do Chang in for a long time, only he's never had the nerve. He's a coward, and a coward's always a rotten liar. Even if he wanted to he wouldn't be able to keep it from Barton. And I don't think Barton really loves us."

"That's true," Lamotte agreed. "Well then, you are taking the pearls to New York. Is that it?"

"That's the idea. We'll go to Rosenbaum. We'll have to play our cards quietly though. If he thinks we're eager to sell, he'll give us a poor price. No use trying to jump him, either. I shall tell him that if I sell 'em at all, I'll sell 'em to Garstein. That'll wake him up. And see here. The Queen of Taukura goes by itself. I know Rosenbaum. He'll offer a round sum for

the lot. Well, I'm not having any. The Queen of Taukura is as handsome as the Beecher pearl. Remember? The one that soap king bought for his wife."

"I remember," said Lamotte. At his tone Stewart looked up sharply.

"What's the matter?"

"What should be the matter? Then you are determined to sell the pearls in New York?"

"Yes. We'll make Honolulu and then—"

"You'll go alone," said Lamotte.

Stewart sat up.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I shall stay in Amanu—with Valerie."

"The devil you will!"

Lamotte shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the idea?" said Stewart. "Why have you suddenly taken this line? I tell you this. If I go alone to New York, you can whistle for your share of the profits. Do you think I'm going half across the world as your errand-boy?"

Anger burned in his slow drawl, anger and a hidden contempt for Lamotte's plans. He knew what lay at the back of it all. He plunged into the heart of the matter.

"You're thinking of Valerie."

"I am," burst out Lamotte. "My God, Stewart, you shall not have her. Oh, I have watched, and I know. Even on the first voyage, before we reached Taukura, it began. Was there ever a woman that you could let alone? You watch her, and your thoughts show in your eyes. How many others have you looked at? Women—women—always women. You bewitch them, I think. But she, Valerie, you shall not have her."

"Those others—they didn't matter."

"No. They did not. And in six months Valerie will not matter. I know you. You can resist no woman and no woman can resist you. Sometimes when I think of your hot hands on her body and your lips close to hers, I could kill you."

"So you're going to take her to Amanu and keep her safe from harm," murmured Stewart in dulcet tones.

"Safe from you, at any rate," Lamotte retorted. "I can work for Tracy in Amanu. And she will be all right with Mrs. Parsons while I am away."

"And you think she will stay there peaceably with you when she knows you killed Donovan?"

There was a sudden silence. Lamotte's face lost a little of its angry color.

"She loves me. She will forgive me if she should ever find out. Besides, you are guilty with me. It was your plan, your contriving. Should I have struck him but for you?"

"She wouldn't forgive you," Stewart told him. "Women are supposed to forgive anything, but they don't. A woman infatuated will forgive anything until she comes to her senses and thinks about it. I want to marry Valerie."

"And I say you shall not. What would her life be? Either she would be left in Amanu or Wakatea while you had your fling of the Islands, or she would drag around after you, unwanted. You have no constancy. You do not know what love means. Passion, lust, desire—yes. All those you feel just as a beast might feel them. That is what you are, Stewart, a man of the senses."

"You can drop that, Saint Paul," said Stewart. "The question is this, are you and Valerie coming to America?"

"No."

STEWART went out of the cabin and Lamotte heard him on deck. He was talking to someone. By and by came the sound of laughter. Lamotte clenched his fists at the sound.

"Where are we going?" Valerie was asking. "Back to Kikia?"

"Farther north," Stewart told her. "I want us to get to Honolulu. From there we shall take the American boat. We might get to San Francisco and then go overland, or we might go by way of Panama. It'll all depend on how soon we get to Honolulu. Are you all right again?"

"I'm rested," she said. "How long is it since we left Paviete? I can't count. My brains don't seem awake. Five or six days, isn't it? I think I shall never be tired of watching people and things and the sea. It's like being born again. If you and Paul hadn't come—"

"It's over," he said soothingly. "That's all past. Don't torture yourself with thinking of what can never happen."

She heard the caress in his lowered voice. Instinctively she moved away. His face darkened.

"You've changed," he said abruptly.

"Have I?"

"Yes. Shall I tell you why?"

"Tell me why you think I've changed."

"Why did you move away just now?"

She laughed.

"Did I?"

"Yes. You thought I was going to touch you. You avoid me. This is only the second time we've talked together since we left Paviete. Before, when we were at Taukura, you were not indifferent to me. What's made you dislike me?"

"I don't dislike you."

"That's a lie," said Stewart. "Can you deny that you liked me once?"

She made no answer.

"It's Morgan," he said, watching her. "You were alone with him for a long time. He's bewitched you. I suppose he told you I was the most notorious commandment-breaker in the South Seas. That's what's set you against me, isn't it?"

"I wish you'd drop the subject," said Valerie. "I'm not a bit interested."

But though she spoke lightly, her tone was forced, and there was a note of distress in the little laugh that she gave.

Stewart's jealousy became intolerable.

"You and Morgan," he said. "You and Morgan, alone. You never speak of what happened in those days and nights. You never tell us what things you saw and said and did. Why? Why? What is there between you?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! Nothing! It's a lie. What did he say to you? What has he told you? He's made love to you. Hasn't he? Answer me."

"Of course he hasn't," said Val hotly. "And even if he had, do you think I'd have listened to him?"

"Yes."

She swung round, her eyes blazing.

"It is the truth," said Stewart passionately. "You love him. I know it. I've watched you. When Lamotte or I speak his name, you listen intently. You yourself never speak his name. You never talk about him. But you think. I've seen you sit idle day after day, looking at nothing and smiling now and then to yourself. You're thinking of someone. And it's not me. You dislike me. You shrink from me. Before you knew Morgan you cared for me. Don't deny it. You did. Now you've changed."

They faced each other furiously.

"Cared for you!" stormed Valerie. "I never cared for you—never. If I ever gave you a second thought it was because I was a fool, a blind fool. I'd never met anyone like you before and I took you for a man. I was wrong. No man would act as you've done. How dare you make insinuations about what happened between Morgan and me when we were in that horrible boat or on the island? Ever heard of chivalry? I had, but I didn't know what it meant until then. You told me he was a rotter and I found him a gentleman. You seem to think I'm in love with you. I'm not. I'm awake now."

"My God!" said Stewart. "So now we have the truth. It is no wonder that you are cold to me. You care for him."

She made no reply.

"You care for him? Answer me. After all, what does it matter? He is dead by now."

"Dead?" she echoed.

"Of course he is. Chang had got him safe somewhere in the hills. Do you suppose he'll ever leave Paviete alive? Do you think Ah Foo would be such a fool as to let him go?"

"You forget the schooner that passed us," she reminded him. "Didn't you tell me that the captain was no friend of yours? He might find Morgan."

"So you've thought it all out! Your mind's been busy with plans for his escape ever since we left Paviete. But he shan't have you. You're mine. Do you hear?"

He came closer. She felt his hot breath on her cheek.

"You're mine. I want you. I love you. I've always loved you. Once I cared whether you loved me or not. I wanted you to think well of me. That's over. Over. Do you understand? I don't care a damn whether you hate me or not. I'm past that. I want you. At first I thought I cared about you like—like I've cared for women before. I was wrong. It's different."

His breath came sharp and short. He spoke jerkily, and his face was white. Once she would have felt a certain pity for him. Now she was conscious of a fierce satisfaction at his suffering. She shrank back from him. Roughly he caught her wrists and forced her to meet his eyes.

"You needn't try to get away. You'll never escape me. You're mine."

"No," said Val desperately. "No—no—no. Let me go. Where is Paul?"

He laughed at her struggles.

"Let me go," she said again. "I hate you. I hate you. Do you think I'd marry a murderer?"

He let her go so suddenly that she reeled.

"What do you mean? Are you thinking of Chang? I killed him in a fair fight. He was a loathsome beast, anyway. And if I hadn't killed him, he'd have killed me."

"It's not Chang."

"Then who—"

"Donovan."

He stared at her.

"So that's what Morgan told you. And you believed him. Of course. So you think I killed Donovan."

"Do you deny it?"

"Of course I deny it."

"Then how did you get the chart?"

"From Donovan."

"Who was found dead, killed by someone. Who was it, if not you?"

"He was killed," admitted Stewart, "and in a fair fight. But not by me."

"Then who?"

"Lamotte."

She stared at him, incredulous.

"Yes. It was Lamotte. Ask him. You'll find he can't deny it."

"It's not true," she said angrily. "You're shielding yourself. You're hiding behind a lie."

"Come and ask him."

They crossed the deck toward the companion-way. The rays of the setting sun slanted across the deck, reddening the planks, staining them the color of blood. In silence Stewart led the way down the steep steps and Valerie followed him with a fast-beating heart. Lamotte was lighting the hanging lamp. He looked up as he heard their footsteps, and at sight of Stewart's face he stood as if turned to stone. The match burnt to his fingers and flickered out.

"You're lighting up early," remarked Stewart.

"What of it?"

"Is it because you don't like the dark? You needn't look like that. Why are you scared of the dark, Lamotte? Is it because of Donovan?"

Lamotte's tongue passed over his dry lips. Valerie pushed Stewart aside and faced her brother.

"Paul, it's a lie, isn't it? I mean—about Donovan. Say it is. You must—you must say it is."

"Ay," said Stewart. "Tell her it's a lie, Lamotte."

Lamotte essayed to speak. His throat worked but no words came. Val went to him and shook his arm.

"Can't you hear? Answer him. He says you're—he says that you—that you—"

With a tragic gesture Lamotte freed himself. His eyes, wandering uncertainly, peered beyond Stewart to the darkness of the companion-way. Into their depths came a look not quite sane.

"How can I deny it when Donovan is listening?"

He walked past them, straight out of the cabin, and they heard his unsteady steps on deck. Valerie leaned against the wall. Dully she found herself wondering if she were going to faint.

"Well?" said Stewart.

She heard the gloating insolence in his voice.

"You're satisfied, eh? He couldn't hide the truth if he wanted to. What chance do you think he'd stand in a court of justice?"

"What do you mean?" she asked stupidly.

But she knew. In a flash she realized why Stewart had told her this thing, why he had made Lamotte himself tell her.

"It's in your hands," he was saying. "If I get what I want, he'll go free. No one knows what happened except me. You see how it is with him. He is haunted. Any court would find out the truth. It is for you to say. If you refuse—you will kill him. I mean it."

He drew back. He reminded her of a tiger about to spring. A tiger, yes, the same lust and cruelty. Suddenly he was on his knees before her. She felt his hot lips on her hands, those small impotent hands that held a man's life in their slender grasp.

## CHAPTER XVI

MARTY came in with Bill Moses of the *Golconda*. Moses was a pedlar of the Islands. He carried on his trade by means of an ancient hulk that he had picked up for a song. They said he had a charmed life. By all the rules the *Golconda* should have been at the bottom years ago. No one but Bill could manage her. She rolled, she leaked, she was the terror of every ship in port owing to her habit of

breaking loose from the most skilful moorings. After every storm men shook their heads and said, "Ah, well, we'll not be seeing the *Golconda* any more after this." Yet every few weeks she came rolling up to Wakatea, and Bill's smug face peered round Marty's door expectantly.

Bill Moses was squat and ugly. He spoke like a quick firing gun, and he could hold liquor with any man in Wakatea except Marty himself.

"Aw, no," he was saying as they entered the store. "Aw, no, Marty, don't you try to fix me up wid dat old bolt of red twill. I'd hate to move it off that counter where it's stood so many years. It might feel kind of strange wid me. And see here. Don't you give me no more of them Red Blush tomatoes. Last lot went bad on me. Guess the cans weren't soldered up right. Got that new crate of sewing machines come in, I see. 'Bout time, too! Any cheaper than last lot? And don't forget the cotton this time. I nearly got scalped over to Johnson Island 'cos I hadn't got any cotton. What's in here? Colored-headed pins. I'll try some. Two dollars for de card? You can keep 'em. Oh, two dollars de lot. I see. Well, you can put in some, den. Who's this? Pettigrew? Hullo, you, dey was tellin' me over in Johnson you'd eloped."

Pettigrew grinned.

"There's some folks'll tell any perishin' lie just to raise a drink. Well, how's things? Been up in Tahiti lately?"

Moses shook his head.

"Not since last year. Took some tourists around while de boat was having a patch on her stern. Yanks, dey was. Said dey'd come in search of primitive beauty and to study human nature in its basic purity. Thought they'd find Tahiti like it used to be. First thing they saw when they landed was a cinema advert. Before they'd finished exclaimin' along came a Chink with a placard announcin' a bargain sale down at Toro's. We couldn't hear what he was shoutin' because there was a row between two taxi-men on de quay. Well, I tell you, we had a joy-day. You'd be surprised at the lack of basic purity in Tahiti. I showed 'em all the shops, and Toro's stores, and the tin churches, and we had lunch in a restaurant. After lunch we hired a motor boat and went around a bit. Bime-by we saw a group of natives in flowers and holiday-paint lying around on the beach in a little bay. When we got closer we met a fiend wid a megaphone shoutin' to us to keep off. Company from Los Angeles filmin' 'My Island Lover,' with Sadie Prince playin' a castaway girl who gets rescued. Yes, she was there, wearin' a lot of nothing, and prancin' round with the island lover. Say, those motion-picture guys do put in a pleasant time. By this time the ladies decided quite suddenly that they'd seen enough primitive beauty, although the men seemed inclined to linger and investigate a bit more. We got back into the harbor and run plumb into an open-air meetin' complete wid brass band and 'Onward Christian Soldiers.' Right opposite Sandy's ice-cream parlor it was, and Sandy's got a gramophone like a fog-horn. Some of the boys had got their best girls along, and well, we retreated on account of the ladies being overcome by shock. 'Why did we ever come?' dey was moaning, 'why did we ever think dat we'd find human nature in all its purity in this awful place?' Well, I butted in. "Scuse me,' I says, 'but you shouldn't look for the two together. Human nature and purity don't mix very well. Here in Tahiti the only thing you're likely to find is human nature, and it's like it always is—damn ugly.' "

"So you've not been to Tahiti since?"

"No. I don't like it. Too many Chinks and half-castes. What wid missionaries and traders and drug-stores,—bah!"

"You've just come from Johnson, then?"

"Ay."

"Anyone there?"

"Carmody came in while I was at Mac's. Said he'd seen the *Swallow*—know the *Swallow?* Stewart and Lamotte own her—well, one of his boys told him the *Swallow* was goin' to make Honolulu. What would Stewart be doin' up that way? Rum-runnin' again? Ah, clever, he is, that Stewart. You won't find him putting the rum-jars in crates marked 'Hymn-books. With Care. This side up.' Oh, no. Very fly, he is. . . . Ah, thank you, Marty. not too much water. Good luck, all."

Pettigrew slipped out and went down to the shore. Here he found Morgan, hot and disheveled, putting the last touches to the *Anna.*

"How is she?"

"She's about right. Was that Bill Moses I saw just now?"

"Yes. See now, we'll have to hurry like

blazes. Stewart's makin' for Honolulu. We know what that means."

"I guessed he'd do that. Did Moses see him?"

"No. But he's been around by Johnson Island. Don't that look as if he was making for Amanu before he goes north? Honolulu's a good way. He'll need to lay in water and stores."

"We'll try it," said Morgan, getting up. "It's our last chance. If we can't get him before he reaches Honolulu, we're done. Once he gets clear of the Islands it's good-by to the pearls."

He was in a fever of impatience. Before the day was over Marty was reduced to a state of indignant profanity. Bill Moses looked on with an amused eye until he understood from a chance word what was the cause of the hurry. Upon learning that the quarry to be hunted was the *Swallow* he rolled up his sleeves and offered to help.

"If you're after Stewart, here's good luck, and you'll need it. But do you think you'll catch him? The *Swallow* is built for speed. You'll try to head him off at Amanu, I suppose. H'm. Well, I doubt if you'll do it. You're sure he'll call in there? Yes, well, he's likely to. But seems to me he'd be likelier still to go to Kikia. Why not? They are not so far apart. Besides— Pereira, you forget Pereira. Stewart will want to leave someone who will look after his interests. Yes, I should look in Kikia first. Are you taking this tool-chest?"

By sunset they were away, and Marty and Bill Moses stood on shore and watched them out of sight. The latter heaved a sigh as they turned back into the store. In silence they drank a toast to the two who might not come back. Both of them were haunted by the last glimpse of Morgan's face as he put the *Anna's* head seaward. It was plain that he was eaten up by the desire to meet and conquer his enemy. For him nothing else mattered. The lust of battle had him in its grip. The determination of a man to win his own again, to wrest it from that robber of the seas, would bear him up until his hour came and the clash of battle began. Whatever happened he would meet it undismayed. So he had turned seaward, his eyes aflame. Pettigrew, standing by him, had turned one wistful look toward the shore. He was old enough to value the years that were left.

"Don't fancy Morgan's looking any too blamed well," ventured Moses after the second glass.

"Oh, he's strong enough. Been through a lot lately. He'll weather the storm all right. It's not him that I'm worrying about. It's Pettigrew. He's getting an old man."

"Got any folks?"

"Don't think so."

"No wife?"

"Had about seven, far as I can reckon. The one he was really married to died years ago. Oh, well, I guess he's gone his own way most of the time. And he's right to stick by Morgan. Mind, if it had been only him, he'd have let the whole perishin' matter go to blzaes. When a man gets to his age, he knows that after all nothin' matters very much in life except just livin'. But Morgan, he don't understand that yet. Everything matters to young folks, I suppose. Well, here's hopin' they'll come back, both of 'em."

"Ay— Now how about that last crate of sewing machines?" said Moses, and the talk drifted to other matters.

MORGAN, heading north, flung on every stitch of canvas despite Pettigrew's warnings. His wrists were healing fast in great ridged scars. On his face new lines showed, carved there by the perils which he and Valerie had endured and conquered. He could settle to nothing. Pettigrew, watching him covertly as he went to and fro, wondered mightily just what had happened during the days they had been separated. But it was very little that he could get out of Morgan. Just the bare facts he knew, of the shipwreck, the hours in the longboat, and the nightmare journey through the Haunted Valley. But Morgan would not talk. It was the hardest work in the world to wring anything out of him. The taciturn fit lasted until they were well out at sea. The strong breeze held and Pettigrew began to calculate the hours till they should sight Kikia. They had determined to take Bill Moses' advice and search first of all in Kikia, before pushing on to Amanu as a last resort. If they did not find Stewart then, all would be in vain. It would mean that he was already far on his way north to Honolulu. But the very fact of his having been seen near Johnson Island argued that he contemplated calling either

at Kikia or Amanu for supplies before he went north. Otherwise, why should he have made the detour? There was a chance, just a bare chance, that they would get him.

Just before nightfall a sea-eagle, flying low, fell exhausted on deck. Morgan picked up the terrified bird and held it, smoothing its feathers with his long fingers. Presently its feeble struggles ceased and it consented to keep still while they fed it with soaked biscuit.

"You hold that bird as tender as a girl," said Pettigrew, watching. "Who's been teachin' you to be so gentle?"

At the look Morgan turned on him he stopped, swallowing back further pleasantry. Light came to him, and he walked away, open-mouthed, marveling at his blindness. So that's what it was! And he, old fool, never guessed. That girl, Lamotte's sister, what was her name? Valerie. Yes, Valerie. He spoke the name aloud and noted the sweetness of the caressing syllables. Yes, that was the heart of the matter. It was not only the thought of the pearls that sent Morgan north in this headlong fashion. It was the girl who was calling him. That explained the feverish impatience with which he had urged pursuit. Look into any trouble and you'll find a woman, mused Pettigrew; find a woman and you needn't look any further for trouble. It's there before your eyes. He wondered whether she cared about Morgan. He considered it highly probable. To his experienced mind it seemed that two young people, sharing common dangers, and utterly cut off from the rest of the world, would be likely to regard each other from a certain standpoint. Then he remembered Val's face as Morgan carried her on deck on the day she refused to come out of her cabin, and he scratched his head uncertainly. With a woman of that temper anything might happen.

He went back to Morgan.

"Bird all right?"

"Ay," said Morgan gruffly.

"Look here," Pettigrew told him, "you needn't go to get riled. I didn't know how it was. I see now all right. And if you get her I'll wish you luck. One thing," he continued ruminatively, "you've seen each other at your worst. She knows how you look when you haven't shaved, and you haven't got much to learn about her when she's in a rage, have you? How did she come out in the longboat? Scared to death, I'll bet."

"She was as plucky as a man," burst out Morgan. "All through, except once when she lost her nerve, she's been as full of grit as any man. Never let out a howl or made a fuss about a damn thing. Till I knew her I looked on women as a cross between dolls and spoilt children. I was wrong. Hats off to 'em, every one of 'em, because of her."

"Does she—ah—did she say—" Pettigrew stumbled over the delicate inquiry.

"No," said Morgan shortly. "She didn't. Because why? Because I never knew until it was too late to ask her. When I woke up in Chang's cursed hovel up in the hills, and found she wasn't there, and I didn't know what had happened to her—I tell you that's when I found it out. I thought I'd go mad. Well, it doesn't matter much. You see, there's—there's someone else."

"Someone else?"

"Stewart."

Pettigrew whistled.

"She doesn't know what he is," went on Morgan, "and I couldn't make her understand. I suppose she fell for him, because he wanted her to, swine that he is."

"If she's so fond of him as all that, wouldn't you be lettin' him alone? Small thanks you'll get from her if you give him what he deserves."

"If you think I'll hold back from having what's rightly mine for the sake of any woman born, you're mistaken," said Morgan. "Am I to let a rotter get away with it just because he's bewitched a woman? Not on your life. When I meet him he'll settle with me for what he's done to me. He's killed my friend and stolen my goods, and no man or woman shall stand between us until he's paid the score."

*In the concluding chapters Morgan and Stewart fight for Valerie and the pearls.*

*Hayti and the Palace of Christophe*

# *Silent* Eyes

*By* HENRY LA COSSITT

VAGUELY, Lawler remembered the legend. He had heard it before, but the little Haitian, barefooted and half-naked, jabbering in Creole, had sputtered it again on the way up. It was to the effect that the Citadel housed a very live spook.

Lawler was an ex-marine. He had come to Haiti in 1915, when the Americans went in. He had been transferred to Santo Domingo a few years later, and there he met his wife. She was a mulatto. Whether that was the reason or not, he quit the marines. That was in 1921. He had three children. One was white, another black, and the third brown. That is the way in Santo Domingo.

He came back to Haiti shortly after his marriage and went to Cape Haitien. There he bought a building, fixed it up, and began his business career, running a dive. His first name was John. The marines called him Father John. They can call anybody anything and get away with it. It was then that Lawler heard of the Citadel, that is, in detail. He had heard of it before, of course, everybody has that has ever been in Haiti. But he got the details from an academic sort of individual who had come to Haiti to observe the conditions.

This stranger was a professor and a magazine contributor and he could recite the clauses of all treaties from Belshazzar to the present date without varying a boundary. So of course he knew all about Haiti. He came to Cape Haitien and put up at the Cosmopolitan. But the marines corrupted him. They heard he was a writing man and took him to Lawler's place to show him some local color. He took a drink. That always happens. And then he took another. And another. And so on.

"Have any of you boys ever been to the Citadel?" said the stranger, after another.

They hadn't.

"Have you ever heard the story about it?"

They had, at least most of them had, but that made not a bit of difference, after another. The stranger told the story.

Now we are not concerned with the stranger much. Nor are we very much concerned with his telling the story, nor the story, but it is necessary to relate a part of it, or this tale will have no sense.

Haiti was once a French colony. It was very wealthy. It owned slaves, and that was the catch. When the French revolution came along the slaves joined the

revolting and, after many things had happened, won their point. Also they killed all the white people in the colony by various means. Various is right. Then they tried to govern themselves. Tried is right too.

Now there were several outstanding men in the horde of slaves that won their point. One of these individuals was Christophe, a lieutenant of Toussaint L'Ouverture's. And when Toussaint was abducted by the French, Christophe presumed to power. He took over the northern part of Haiti and ruled it with an iron hand. Also he built the palace of Sans Souci and the Citadel. Sans Souci was at the base of the mountain, the Citadel on top of it. Sans Souci was Christophe's residence, the Citadel his last resort should France ever return the compliment or one of his rivals bring up an argument. Both are standing today.

The mountain is about a mile high and the Citadel sits on it something like the cap-stone of a pyramid. It is a gloomy, awful place. The walls are a hundred feet high. From the top of them one may look down on the Great North Plain of Haiti and imagine he is in an aeroplane. On the other side is a confusion of crinkled heights that look sombre and lonely, and are.

Within the walls there are corridors upon corridors superimposed on each other. There are stairways that seem to be endless; that are slippery with water and lichens and dangerous to negotiate. And there are hundreds of cannon and balls to shoot from them (although it was never done), while below run passages deep into the mountain, dark passages that never have been explored; gloomy caverns of nothingness that emit a chill, dank breath. And there is silence. Yes, there is silence.

And somewhere in that gloom and silence Christophe buried a lot of gold. All the gold, in fact, that he had been able to steal, which was considerable, and people have been looking for it ever since. Also—and this is the legend you were reminded of in the first paragraph—his spirit is supposed to be there watching the gold, waiting to precipitate the presumptuous into the bottomless shafts that go no one knows where, and which are overgrown with vines and creepers. Either that or he may pitch them over the wall outside and let them drop a thousand feet. At any rate, his spirit is supposed to be there.

This, in substance, is what the writing man told to the marines, and, incidentally, Lawler. It was quite a yarn. Most of the marines were very sorry to hear that Christophe had shot himself (for that is what he finally did) and one of them wept out loud. The stranger was touched too. Also he was very exhausted. The telling of the tale had been very trying on him, he said, and he believed that he would go back to the hotel. And so saying he pitched forward and landed with a resounding thud on Lawler's worn floor. The marines carried him back to the Cosmopolitan. It is frequently like that.

## II

NOW Lawler was touched too. He was thinking, a strange process for him. Lawler was an Hungarian. He was big and bony, with tremendous slabs of more or less shapeless meat at the ends of his arms and legs, and his arms were inordinately long. His face was grizzled and leathery, tanned by years of exposure to a tropical sun. His lips were thick, and his nose had no particular shape. His eyes were small and sharp, but they had a way of growing dull on occasions, which was disarming. They were set close together and were overhung with a pair of heavy brows that fringed down over the eyepit like long grass over a cliff. He was bullet headed and partially bald, and he usually needed a shave. He wore a tremendous black hat that rested on those heavy brows, and his bony chassis usually was clad in light khaki, while a pair of immense laced boots reached to his knees.

You always bought your liquor straight in Lawler's place. Neither he nor the scar-faced Dominican mulatto that tended bar with him knew how to make cock-tails. And after you bought the straight liquor you felt as if you had swallowed a hot potato.

As I said, Lawler was touched, and he was thinking over the stranger's yarn. He had heard the story before, with the tale of the gold and the legend of the spirit, but he hadn't thought much about it. His friend, the ancient woman known as Madame Renan, had told him. It was whispered that she was a witch and could cast out devils or bring them on with equal facility, and that she had numerous protections against the evil eye. Also it was whispered

that she was a Vaudoux Mamaloi and that she was very fond of the flesh of children. It was said that she never conducted a ceremony without calling for "The Goat Without Horns" and the marines had, for years, been trying to trip her up. But she was too wise for them.

Her connection with Lawler was for the sole purpose of obtaining strong rum and dope to be administered to the faithful of her sect before the ceremony began. Occasionally, of course, there would be added to this choice mixture the blood of an animal, or, if in the mood, the blood of a child. So Lawler cultivated the madame. She was a good customer, even though she was a half-cracked old hag.

When she had told him the story Lawler had merely dulled his small eyes and said nothing, and he had thought little more of it. But now, here was this stranger, this writing man, who should know what he was talking about. And he had told practically the same tale. So Lawler pondered.

Midnight came and went; and the morning hours began their climb. He rested his chin in his hands, his elbows, a glass of absinthe between them, on the bar, and began to churn his slow convolutions. The madame had said she knew where the gold was, that she had a chart, (he was not thinking about the legend then) that she would give it to him for a price, that she—

The churning worked. He stepped gingerly around the bar and across the dance hall, pausing only to curl his lip at his wife ensconced in the arms of a sailor off a Dutch freighter. The sailor was very drunk. Lawler passed on. There were no people about. The doors and windows were barred. He got his automobile and drove rapidly. He drove east. Down the main street he sped to the little bridge that spans a creek about to empty into the bay. Across the bridge and the road curves with the bay until the coast starts back to the sea, and then the road runs inland until you come to a cross road. Lawler turned at this cross road, turned to his left. He followed it until he entered the village of Petit Anse, directly across the bay from Cape Haitien. On this point Columbus built a fortress. Lawler didn't know that, and it has nothing to do with this story.

There he stopped and locked his car. He made his way through a clump of squat houses to a thatched hut on the water's edge. He paused a moment to make sure no marine or gendarme was near and then knocked softly. No response. Again the soft knock. Again no response. He knocked again. From within came a metallic whisper in Creole. Lawler answered it. The door opened, he slipped in, and Petit Anse again possessed vacant streets.

Lawler blinked in the light of a candle held by an ancient crone. Her skin once black had faded; her eyes were watery and the pupils were rimmed, and her lips were, if anything, thin and colorless. She grinned. Her teeth had been filed into points and her leer was terrifying. Lawler began the conversation, which was in Creole.

"Greetings, madame, in the name of the Serpent," said he.

"The Serpent, Father John, has little to do with your business this night. Out with it. But tell me first, do the marines know where my people worship?"

"That I cannot say," answered Lawler.

"Then they do not," said the crone, rubbing her lips in a satisfied manner, "or you would have known of it. The drunken talk much. But why did you come here at this hour? Did anyone see you?"

"No. There has been much drinking and the boys have gone home. No one is abroad in the Cape. Even at my place things are quiet. That is why I came at this hour. You know, madame, it is not well for me to be seen with you, and besides I don't like your goings on. Some day the gendarmes will be watching when you string up a kid and then what will you do?"

"Have no fear of the gendarmes, Father John. There are several who worship the Serpent themselves. They tell me everything. But why did you come?"

"Well, you once told me about the Citadel. I didn't pay much attention then, but I have been thinking it over and—"

"You think you can find the gold. And for that reason you want the chart. Is that it?"

"Yes, that's it, I want the chart. But how do you know it is correct?"

"It is correct. I know. It has come down from Christophe. It passed from one of his sons to Soulouque, the emperor. He was a worshipper of the Serpent. My mother served in the palace then. Soulouque was very fond of her. In fact, I don't know but what he was my father. She stole the chart from him. He was

keeping it for himself, but he never got a chance to use it. The revolution chased him out. It was on that day that my mother got it. She was a priestess too.

"She never got to use it either. I stole it from her and ran away the night Port au Prince burned. I don't know what happened to her. I suppose she was burned up in the fire. I ran to the hills and a priestess took me in. I forgot the chart for a long time, and when I remembered it, it wasn't safe for Mamaloix to be abroad. That is why I never have used it. You know how they watch me."

"Yes, I know," said Lawler, whose mind was already picturing all sorts of things, "but I will buy it from you. What do you want?"

"I told you once," answered the crone. "Rum and cocaine, enough to last until I die. I need it. It gives my people courage."

"Very well, name the amount. You'll get it."

She named the amount. Lawler made a note of it with a stub of a pencil and a dirty sheet of foolscap.

"And now the chart, madame," said he.

"Yes, the chart, dear Father John," said she, "but if you double-cross—well, I am old. I can die or go to prison and it will make no particular difference to me. But if I give myself up and name you as the man who has helped me carry on the Vaudoux, how will they deal with you?"

"I understand, madame, I will not double-cross."

"I know you won't. You're too smart. But remember the spirit."

"What spirit?"

Lawler looked up at her. Her eyes were gleaming evilly and her pointed fangs looked unreal in the candle light. She eyed him and chuckled with a gurgling, throaty sound.

"The evil spirit, fool, the spirit of Christophe. He guards the gold he stored there. He watches for such as you. It has been tried before. Have you not heard?"

"I don't want to hear. I don't give a damn for spirits, witch, I'm after gold. I think I can handle spirits all right."

"You do, do you? Have a care, fool, have a care. The Citadel is lonely. It is weird. The spirit wanders about. He watches the steep approach. The holes are deep and the cliffs are high. Have a care." And she croaked her laugh again.

"Aw, go to hell!" said Lawler in very good English, and he took the chart and left. But as he did he heard her cackling.

## III

IT WAS almost noon of another day when Lawler reached the Citadel. He had bought a pick and a shovel, a lantern and a flashlight and some food supplies, and had taken some whisky and cigarettes from his saloon. With these and his Colt .45 he started on his golden adventure. He loaded the stuff in his car and drove off, following the road he had taken to the madame's for a few kilometers, then branching off to the right. A few more kilometers and he stopped. A Haitian awaited him. Together they unloaded the car, and packed the stuff on two burros. Also there was a Haitian pony, scrawny and underfed, for Lawler to ride. He drove his car into the thick bush, concealing it, threw a tarpaulin over it; mounted the pony, and rode off into the jungle. The Haitian followed, leading the burros.

Lawler's thick head was full of dreams. They glittered and dazzled him. The legend of the spirit had faded. The legend of the gold possessed him. He smirked and chuckled. It was a good gamble anyway. The chart looked plausible, for he had studied it, as far as study for him was possible. But the little Haitian insisted on telling the story of the spirit all over again. As he panted and tugged at the burros and cut away the thick vines with his machete along the trail up the mountain, he jabbered and warned Lawler. But Lawler didn't hear. He was too interested. The legend slithered into his mind and hung vaguely, but he did not know it was there. All morning they climbed, and close on to noon they reached there. Lawler was a little startled.

It loomed. It was awful. Its tremendous walls and battlements scowled. The windows of the thing peered at him like the eyes of Argus, of whom Lawler had never heard, but it made him uneasy anyway. That was when he vaguely remembered the legend, but he put it away in a moment, for they had reached the door at the base of the high wall that looks out to the east.

Together they labored up and down the slippery stairway with the supplies, climbing

to the flat court atop the walls where Lawler had planned to stay. On second thought he removed the provisions to a room which, runs the story, was the banquet hall of Christophe. It was mentioned in the chart. Lawler chose it for that reason.

They ate about three o'clock, and the Haitian muttered that it was not safe to stay over night. So Lawler told him he might go. That seemed to satisfy him, and it satisfied Lawler, for the fewer witnesses to his treasure digging, thought he, the better. The Haitian left, and as he left the sun was approaching the hazy rim of the western mountains.

Its long rays shone through the arched doorways and into the silent corridors. They filtered through the crevices in the hoary walls and lingered for a few moments on the lichened stones that had lain there for more than a century. With a burst of moribund radiance the great disc reached the rim and rested there, glorifying the clouds that rested on the slopes and animating them beyond their wont. In such a light the battlements up above Lawler took on a new pride, a royalty of appearance, if but for a moment. They cast huge shadows on the mountain sides, basked in their ephemeral divinity, and then faded into the sky. The sun had fled.

Lawler was alone.

Dusk crowded in and crowded out the light, but the silence prevailed over the gloom. It slid in with the darkness. It crept up the walls and the white sound that they gave in the sunlight was stilled. It crushed the stones and they melted away into the gloom. A drop of water fell and was killed. The Great North Plain that Lawler had seen in the afternoon light clouded into haze, then disappeared.

Lawler was alone.

He lighted the lantern and built a fire. This helped a little and the bacon and beans helped more. But more than these, helped the whisky. It cheered him. He unfolded the chart. The annotations were in French, but the madame long ago had duplicated them in Creole. He was to leave the room he was in by the west entrance. Then he was to follow that corridor to the first flight of steps that descended. Once down these he should proceed along the ensuing passage in the same direction until he came to a point where two doors were painted on the wall. There he was to knock out the wall and go into a room that had been sealed when the place was built. He was then to descend another flight of steps and at the bottom he would find the spot. Rather there were two flights of steps, one straight, and the lowest curved. Directly in front of the last step of this curved stairway he was to find the treasure. And he should not venture further, for on the chart this passage had no end, but wandered on down into the stomach of the mountain.

Simple, thought Lawler, but the place was so damned quiet. He looked up and around. Where the doors had been that afternoon was blackness. The light of his lantern did not venture far. It stayed close to the wick and Lawler turned it higher. Even that did not help much and he reflected that he must conserve his oil. So he turned it down again. He moved his chair against the wall so that he would have his back to something. That chair had been there for more than a century. He tried to keep his mind on his chart, but he thought more of his gun. He drew it and lay it in his lap. A drop of water cracked nearby. He started violently. He took a long drink of whisky. There, that was better. That was fine. He got his flashlight and threw it on the entrance he was to go through. But its rays seemed strangely inadequate. They only revealed deep gloom, gloom that appeared to harbor something, so he switched it off. He took another long drink of whisky. He dozed. He awakened. His wrist watch said it was eleven, so he spread his blankets and lay down. He took another long drink. He slept.

Troublous dreams attacked him. Livid shapes danced before him, livid shapes that emerged from the gloom of that corridor where he had thrown his flashlight. Husky whispers pierced his ears. He groaned. Something gnawed at his throat. It was terrible. He fought it; he tried vainly to scream; he writhed; he awakened. It was merely a contraction of the skin.

Out through the door roared the dawn. It crashed over the stones and thundered into the corridors. Over the plain, far below, it sped, the pæan of morning. Up rose the sun, an ambling, flaming turtle, to hang, gazing and calling to the earth. The day was come; the light was come; sound was

come; friendly sound. Lawler rushed out and up to the court. He breathed deeply and stretched his stiff and slightly rheumatic legs. The night had been damp and he had not slept well. He was glad the night was gone, relieved that it was gone, and he felt a little proud of himself to think that he had passed it in the Citadel. Now, thought he, the thing would be easier on the following night or nights, as the case might be. He had gone through one; the others would not be so bad. And so on. The thought buoyed him.

Below, the plain was beautiful. One could see as far as the ocean, and there was the Cape, snuggling at the base of a vagrant spur that had run away to the sea. Also there were Dondon, Marmelade, and Plaisance, and he actually believed he could see Louise, far away on the Baie de l'Acul, but he wasn't certain.

A mist hung over the mountains and the plain, colored by the sun. It probably came from the sea. Down the slope, banana groves, leaves weeping with the morning wet, shimmered in the sunlight. Great ceiba trees, enslaved by vines, grew in clumps on some miniature plateau, as if they were patterns in a carpet. Epidemics of purple creepers mingled with the vines and regalized the slavery. Crowds of hibiscus flamed through the bush and palms of all types shook and flapped their fronds in the morning breeze. A robin alighted near Lawler and chirped, happy to be in his winter home.

## IV

LAWLER whistled.

He turned suddenly from his lookout point, lit a cigarette, and went back to his sleeping quarters, where he kindled a fire and got breakfast. The coffee was hot and cheering; the bacon was crisp and tart; the beans were luscious. As he ate, he studied his chart. He must get busy. Suppose the Haitian flunkey that had helped him up should say he was up there. Suppose it got back to the Cape. Or suppose the madame should get caught and tell all she knew. He must hurry. He must get the gold, if there was any, and leave.

That was it. That was exactly what he would do. He would leave. But his wife—oh well, she could run the place. But his kids—they could never live in the States anyway. At least, he couldn't live with them, with their variety of colors; that was impossible. But why had he married the wench in the first place? Oh well, she had been pretty attractive then. Her skin had been the color of bronze and it shone softly, and she had been soft and sensuous, with white teeth and eyes like little lakes of pitch, and her kisses had set those lakes on fire and turned his blood to flame. Yes, he supposed, it was that fire that had made him marry her.

Now his wife was not bronze; she was yellow. Her eyes no longer caught fire at kisses; they were dull and opaque and weary and the glint in them was hard. Her teeth had faded. Her skin was not soft; it was coarse and rough. True to her type, a woman of the tropics, she had atrophied and aged in a few years.

Yes, he must leave. He must get the gold and leave her and the kids. He must get away from this risky business. The madame was too spooky anyway. What had she meant with all that talk about the spirit? She was just trying to kid him, that was all. But she was like that. She was kidding those poor devils that drank the rum and took the dope. He must get away from her too. Without her his business was all right. Of course every now and then he peddled a little dope on the side, and once he had given too much "snow" to a white girl who was suffering from yaws. It had killed her, but it had been for her own good, he thought. Yes, he must leave. He had spent too much time in the tropics anyway.

He took his shovel and his pick, his flashlight and his lantern, and a small sledge he had brought, and started out the west entrance of his apartment. He proceeded down the corridor to the flight of steps and started down. Beneath him lay blackness, silent; so silent that it seemed sentient; so black it seemed pregnant with shapes that beat against it and bulged it.

Lawler hesitated.

Little tingles of iciness raced up his spine. Little tugs pulled at his skin and tightened it. Little fingers, thousands of them, scratched his scalp. He felt for his holster. It was gone! A trembling instant in which he gasped, and he rushed up the steps. The blackness rushed after him. The light! The light!

It fought the blackness. It roared defiance at the silence. It pushed back the bulging shapes. Lawler strapped on his holster. Back in the light he was courageous again. With his gun he felt better. With his whisky he felt better, and he put it in his hip pocket, after drinking liberally. Then he started again.

Smoking a cigarette, his tools over one shoulder, their handles thrust through the handle of the lantern, and with his flashlight in the other hand, Lawler invaded the blackness. Boldly, he threw his torch upon it and it retreated. He advanced down the steps and along the lower corridor. He followed it for an interminable distance, it seemed to him, examining the walls on either side. At length he came to the painted doors.

The paint was faint and weak from the dampness of a hundred years and more. They were quaint doors. Their painted paneling might have been scraped from the gateway of some old English manor, and their huge painted knocker was the head of a hippogriff which had a brass ring in its mouth. Lawler didn't like the head at all. He lit his lantern and took another drink. He smashed at the hippogriff with his sledge. It was a damaging blow. He tried again, and the hippogriff was on the verge of extermination. One eye glared fiercely in the lantern light, unearthly, thought Lawler with an audible oath, when down came the sledge on it and the hippogriff was gone. Lawler kept up the tattoo.

The wall sounded hollow, all right, and he felt elated. The crumbling plaster seemed to stimulate his blows and his long arms worked like a windmill. He swung rapidly, enjoying the exercise. He forgot the blackness that sat at the fringe of his lantern light and watched him curiously. He forgot the bulging shapes. He forgot the silence that cowered at the crash of his hammer. He beat furiously at the wall. That was all he could think of at the moment. Finally he succeeded. The stone cracked, followed the plaster, and a black hole appeared. He knocked away the wall and widened it. With each blow it became wider and wider and it sent a gust of foul air into Lawler's face. For some reason it reminded him of the dead. If you opened a tomb, thought he, you would get such air as that.

He gathered his tools and stepped through. There were the steps. He descended. Down, down, down, he went to a landing, and then there were the others, curving further down. He followed them. They wound around like the steps in a tower, far into the mountain, until they came to a passage where they ended. There, before the last step, Lawler was to find his gold, perhaps. Oh, but he would find it. The chart had been right so far. It had been correct in every detail, and surely it must have some reason for existing. Surely it would not have been made without some purpose, and the person who had made it must have been familiar with the Citadel and all its crannies. He began to dig.

Again he was engrossed. Again he forgot the curious blackness and the outraged silence, the bulging shapes that surrounded his light. They waited, held at bay by the light, but at each flicker they rushed forward, only to be thrown back.

Lawler swung his pick, swung it feverishly. It pierced the clay and chipped the soft, spongy rock. He pulled out great chunks of the crumbling stuff and cast them behind him into the midst of the watchers. Deeper and deeper, he dug, and wider and wider, until almost the whole floor in front of the first step was broken. Down he went into the hole which was knee deep, and down further, for he was digging faster now. He reached up and got his lantern. He set it beside him in the hole. The watchers approached the brink and waited. It would not be long. They peered down at him, but he was oblivious at the time. He was digging so rapidly that he frequently lost his balance. The sweat popped out on his grizzled head; he breathed heavily and the walls echoed his breath. He clenched his teeth and kept on. Faster, faster, faster. He lost all track of time. He was pursuing, pursuing the glittering dream in his head. It beckoned him; it led him far from Haiti, across the sea to Paris and ease, to luxury and pleasure in the States, to idleness and riches. He dug fiercely, blowing the sweat from the stubble on his lip where it lingered, rolling from his shapeless nose. His khakis were wet; his boots damp and uncomfortable; and his tremendous hat felt like a heated band about his head. He could not keep it up. It was no use. He sat down to rest, leaned back against the side of the hole and lit a

cigarette. Its smoke was soothing and a drink relaxed him.

He contemplated the hole. He had dug more than five feet, and it was fully six feet across the top. He should be getting somewhere soon. Christophe had certainly buried deep. Or had he buried at all? Was it a wild goose chase? Had the madame gypped him? The old hag. It was not improbable. She had wanted her liquor and dope. And she had found an easy way to get it. He was the easy way. He had been a fool. Yet, the chart was old and looked authentic. So far it had been correct. Everything had turned out according to its directions. But the hole was pretty deep already. And if he got the gold how would he get it away? Why hadn't he been satisfied to stay in the Cape? His business was good. His profits were comfortable. But the gold would set him on easy street. Surely the madame wouldn't try to gyp him. He had too much on her for that.

HE GOT up to stretch. He felt stiff. Whether she had put anything over on him or not, she had given him a rough road to follow. The perspiration chilled on him as he stood. The madame said she knew of the gold, knew of it positively. As the perspiration chilled, he sagged. Reaction set in. But what was it she had said about the spirit? That was bunk, of course, but he wished he could forget her laugh. That croaking laugh, that steely laugh. It rasped against his drums as he stood, shivering. She was a damned old fool. A drop of water crashed nearby. Lawler started violently. He looked up.

Vividly, Lawler remembered the legend. He gazed into the blackness above. The bulging shapes writhed against its walls and ceiling. They beat against the light and chased its flickers. They started at him and threatened, then drew back. Another drop of water slapped the stone and was stifled. It filled Lawler with frigid dread. He caught his breath sharply. The blackness took up the sound and echoed it. He stood motionless. Sound seemed to irritate that blackness. Sound seemed to bring hosts out of nowhere. Sound seemed to betray him. He felt for his gun. It was there. He reached back for his lantern, keeping his eyes on the nothingness above him. His pick? His shovel? Oh, he would be back and use them again. It was no use to lug them back. Softly he climbed out of the hole. He lit his flash, and put out the lantern. He backed into the wall and stood there at bay. Slowly he climbed the steps, sideways, his back against the curving wall, the flash in front of him, the lantern slung on his arm and his hand on his revolver.

Slowly the blackness followed him, creeping at the edges of the light. Its bulging, dancing ring moved as he did, slowly, relentlessly, cruelly, avidly. The dropping water seemed to agitate those bulging shapes. They whirled furiously with each sound. Lawler was sweating again, but this time it was cold. It was clammy, and it chilled his breast as it trickled down. His temples throbbed violently. The silence rang in his ears. Softly now, softly. Each noise betrayed him; each shuffle endangered him. He reached the straight stairway. Up, up, ever so slowly, softly, carefully—the revolver was drawn now—tiptoeing awkwardly, until he reached the top. He crawled through the hole he had smashed in the wall. The darkness rushed at his back. Panic seized him. He threw himself through violently. He slipped. He fell. The flash fell from his hands. It broke.

The blackness fell on him greedily; the silence was at his throat. Panic maddened him. He screamed, and the darkness screamed back at him. He rushed up the corridor away from the hollow echo of that scream, away from the blackness, away from the bulging shapes that were upon him. He reached the steps leading to the corridor above and fell. His face and hands were cut, but he did not know it. He tore up the stairs and down the upper corridor. Panic was at his back; panic rode his shoulders. Ice was in his spine. The tugs were at his skin again. The little fingers were digging their nails in his scalp. The blackness rushed after him, surrounded him. All its hosts seemed to be directly behind him, waiting to fall on him and mangle him. The light! The light! But there was no light. Only darkness, bulging darkness. He reached his camp. All was darkness. Night had come to aid the murk of the corridors. But he rushed out into the night. Out into the open and then the stars.

The stars! They sang to him. They twinkled beautifully at him. They mingled the deep blue of the tropical night with the silver of the milky way, took their own glittering mercury and sent it down to him. The Southern Cross loomed to defend him. The Great Bear bellowed his aid. Orion lent his sword and Lawler sobbed. Great heaving sobs that wracked his whole frame and set his leathery hide trembling. He threw himself on the ground and shook, shook hysterically, his lantern still on his arm and his gun still clasped desperately. Gradually the sobs subsided; gradually he shook less frequently and violently, until finally he lay very still. He slept.

The air was damp. From the heights to the southeast came a cloud. It glided toward the Citadel, falling stealthily, like a shroud, upon the great fortress. Its tenuous streamers floated into the corridors and through them and hung there. It covered the whole structure, veiling the towers, clothing the ramparts in spectral garments and it shut off the stars. It swathed Lawler in its coldness and sank into his skin. He awakened.

Mechanically he lit his lantern, and groped his way to his camp. Its rays were more inadequate than ever now, with the mist hanging in the room. Lawler sat down in the chair and lit a cigarette. Again he drank his whisky, a long drink that drained the bottle. He threw it down and leaned back. As he did so, he heard a rustle. It was faint, but it was clear enough. His tortured nerves burned through his body like an electric current. The mist mingled with his blood. His muscles tightened till they pained him and again the clammy sweat rested on his nameless nose. The rustle came from his left. Slowly, painfully, he turned his head. Softly he turned his head, rather something else turned it. It was automatic. He saw.

Eyes! They burned through the mist beyond the edge of his light. An arc of them, a weird arc of crimson dots glowing in the gloom. They flickered in the cloud; they moved. Lawler watched them, motionless as a cliff. His eyes dulled as he did so. He was hypnotized, fascinated, immobile. His fingers relaxed and the revolver they had held in desperate clutch so long fell from them.

There was a flash and a report. The eyes vanished. Lawler screamed. He rushed from the room out under the clouds. He ran, he knew not where. He scrambled over the ruined inner walls and on. He felt the smooth surface of bricks beneath his feet. He ran faster. The surface was snatched from beneath him, there was a rush of air, and he lost consciousness.

MORNINGS are beautiful in Haiti. The peaks are crowned with empyreal glory in the clouds and the sunlight. But sunrise has been described before. On this particular morning two marine officers were enjoying it with a horseback ride. They had chosen to climb the mountain and visit the Citadel.

"A Haitian wench," said one, "found a guy at the foot of the cliff beneath the other side of the Citadel this morning. He was all busted up. Must have fallen over the wall. A white man, too."

"Who was it?"

"Haven't heard yet. They put Bond on the case."

They went on until they reached the Citadel. There they tethered their horses and climbed the slippery steps to the top.

"Here," said the first, "is where he must have fallen from. Why he did it or how, I can't see. Seems like a man could see what it was."

"May have been loco," said the other, "may have killed himself."

"Maybe so."

They continued walking and began rummaging around the rooms.

"For Gawd's sake, look at the rats," said one.

"Yeah, they're eatin' something," said the other. "Damned if it isn't some bacon and beans. Now how did they get up here."

They were silent for a moment. Then they looked at each other.

"Do you suppose," said one, "that there's anything to this spirit business they tell about?"

# The Return to the Brute

## *A Feud Story of the Southern Mountains*

*By* HARRY HARRISON KROLL

OLD Rattlesnake Reed stood at one end of the mantel giving ear to what his boys said, sometimes frowning, sometimes nodding approval. The seven sons sat in a semicircle around the fireplace. The supper simmered in the pot over the coals. It was just sundown.

"Luck Stepens ort to be here ary minute now," said Neal. Neal was the oldest son—a gorilla sort of man, close to forty. "With all the man-power he war going to fotch, we kin simply surround Lud Kimmins' shanty and put the fixings to him without taking no chances a-tall!"

Rattlesnake's eyes gleamed at this. The flat-browed faces of all the boys save one—that of Benjamin, the youngest—lighted up. The patriarchal white beard of the father, surrounding a face that was vacant except for the brute cunning in it, wagged up and down emphatically.

"Shoot the cabin so full of lead cain't possibly miss the rascal!" he agreed.

Had any of them noticed Benjamin, he would have seen the boy's shapely hand—"a gal's hand," Neal was wont to describe it—cross the wistful face with a trembling gesture. But nobody noticed. "Benjy war sissy!" Neal always said.

"Halooo-ooo!" came a mellow call at the big gate a hundred yards down in front of the cabin.

"Thar's Luck now," said Neal.

"Hayooo-oo, Rattlesnake!" repeated the hail.

With a blundering sidewise motion of his vast angular frame, old Rattlesnake stepped to the door, stooping beneath the lintel.

*Spang!* snarled a metallic spittle of sound. The old man gasped, half turned, cast his big eyes queerly over his seven sons, and gently toppled to the floor. Benjy, staring through the little square of window at front, saw a horseman dart into the cedar glade across the big road.

"By gawd!" Neal started up, growling a terrible curse. "That war the dirty work of Lud Kimmins—he found out sommers—"

The boys laid the big form on the bed and covered it with a sheet.

"Two of you—Buck and Sel—stay yer with Benjy," ordered Neal. "Me and the rest of the boys air going after that skunk!"

They took down their guns from the racks above the different doors of the room, filled their pockets with ammunition, and set grimly off through the ashen dusk in pursuit of the killer.

So the night set in. To Benjamin it was the bitterest experience he ever lived. He hated war. He feared bloodshed. He loved his father—although Rattlesnake had been wrong all his life. The two brothers left with him—for there was money in the cabin—hunched over the low fire, their guns across their laps, waiting, tense, silent except for an occasional grunt or monosyllable.

To Benjy it did not seem possible that the form on the bed would never move again; that the pulpy lips would open never again to comfort him in his weakness. For Rattlesnake—and a snake he had been to most, as his enemies could testify—had never had ought for Benjy but a tolerant, if not a kindly word. So he sat there in the gloom, looking at the bed. The boys smoked and cursed.

So the night wore away.

With the coming of dawn, the two other brothers took down their guns.

"Neal and them ort to been back before now," said Sel. "Me and Buck air going to set forth and see whut's come of them. Benjy, you stay here, and dig the grave, and if we hain't back by sundown, bury pap. We hain't comin' back till hell claims whut's the devil's!"

They went down the path across the calf pasture, disappearing in the glade where the horseman and four brothers had gone the past evening.

Sick of soul, Benjamin made a rude plank coffin for his father, dug the grave back of the smokehouse, and when none of his brothers returned by the hour of sundown, performed the last rites. At the head of the grave he read a chapter of the Bible in a clear youthful voice, for he had learned to read from his semi-literate mother before she died, and had become proficient in the art by virtue of his peculiar sensitive loneliness; then he prayed, haltingly enough; at the end dragging the clay back into the hole with hoe and pick. Then he wiped the clay off the pick so it would not rust, and with the same gesture mopped his eyes with his shirt sleeve.

Suddenly he stood erect.

"Hit ain't worth it!" he cried vehemently. "All they do air fight—fight! I hate fighting. I wants peace. They hain't nothing to keep me here. I'm going to git my sheer of the money and hull out!"

Returning to the cabin, he invaded the ancient hair trunk belonging to his father, taking from it the sack of money received for the cedar timber. His first inclination was to stuff the entire amount into his pocket. All his brothers would do with the money would be to waste it in riotous living, buying rotten whisky, making trips to Knoxville and throwing it away until they had no more to throw.

But his natural sense of honesty stayed him. He counted the cash, found it to be a trifle over two thousand dollars, and took a thousand in currency. That was his equity in the timber. His mother had always said that half her part of the home place, where the cedar had been cut, belonged to her last born. Afterwards he gathered his few garments into a bundle, and pulled his wool hat down over his thin brow. All set, he went out at the door. It would likely be the last he ever saw of the place where he had been born, and dwelt in bitterness and fear till now. Down at Connersville, twenty-seven miles away, it was reputed that people lived like civilized folks.

Benjamin started off through the red sunset to peace and civilization.

The big gate leading into the road was a primitive contraption with baling wire for hinges. One strand of this wire stuck out, and as Benjamin opened it his eye caught on a tuft of something he had never before noticed. The object was a button. The vivid instant of the wheeling horseman recurred to him. He remembered now that the horse bucked, and the man's coat had caught on the wire. Here was the button, and a little bit of cloth. Benjamin pulled the thing off and put it into his pocket. He had seen just such a colored suit on Lud Kimmins' back the last Sunday at preaching.

THE next morning saw a very natural thing happen in the civilized area of Connersville's business section. Old Pete Beasley was hanging bananas out in front of Leed Whaley's grocery and market when a gawky youth, nineteen or thereabouts, barefoot and travel stained, came around the corner.

"I smelt 'em," said Benjamin hungrily. "Whut's they worth?"

"Thirty cents a dozen."

"Gimme two dozen."

Beasley's eyes fairly popped out.

"Say, you hain't expecting to eat two dozen right off the bat, air you?"

But his astonishment at the eating feat was transferred to the size of the bill Benjamin presented in payment.

"Great balls of catfish! Whur'je git a hunnerd dollar bill? Thar hain't that much change in the house. You'll have to wait till the bank opens. Myrtie!" he suddenly raised his voice.

With a look of amusement upon her face, as if she had been spying upon the humorous situation from the inside, a pretty girl appeared in the doorway. Benjamin looked at her carefully, appreciatively, while he calmly devoured one banana after another. This flower was the product of the civilization he coveted. He knew it instinctively.

"What is it, Mr. Beasley?"

"You hain't got as much as a hundred dollars change in yur papp's safe upstairs, have you?"

The girl shook her head.

"I think papa took all the money he had in the safe day before yesterday, when he went up the mountain buying cattle. I don't know the combination, anyway." She talked to the elderly clerk, but her eyes rested on Benjamin.

"You'll have to wait around till the bank opens, then, sonny."

"I want a job!" declared Benjamin. The odors of this place of business, so new to one who has never known anything but the scents of wild mountain flowers, the acrid inhalations of autumn nuts, and the flavors of newly turned farmland, intrigued him.

Beasley laughed, a horse laugh of deep and genuine merriment.

"Why, boy—"

The girl stopped the laugh with an outburst equally surprising.

"Why not?" she asked. "He looks strong, and maybe he's apt to learn, and we've got to have somebody, with Jim not showing up this morning. Why not try him?"

"But whut'll yur pappy say when he comes back?" asked the clerk doubtfully. "He never give me no authority to hire folks."

"I'll fix that up with daddy all right. Go ahead and hire him. What's your name, boy?"

"Benjy Reed," replied Benjamin easily.

Both the clerk and girl started at this news. Evidently the name of Reed was sufficient to blanch cheeks away down here. Benjamin saw the change in the two, and undertook eagerly to correct any false impression they might get from his kinfolks.

"But I run off from them because they air bad folks," he explained. "I air dead sick of fighting and scrapping!" He raised gaunt arms above his head, like a woman, and let them drop back again to his side —a tragic gesture of pain, while his eyes stayed alight with hope. "I will work hard fur you. Tell me whut to do. I'll show yur pap when he comes home how good a worker I air!"

His eyes, his hands, his whole body were alive with eagerness. The girl smiled. She must have read something in the boy that the older man, dulled by experience, could not discern, being blinded by his suspicions.

Benjamin took no chances on delays, but grasped the broom Beasley had picked up, and commenced frantically to sweep.

"It'll be all right," nodded Myrtie. "I'll fix it with papa."

Suddenly Benjamin stopped.

"Who's yur pap, anyhow?"

"Leed Whalen."

It was the boy's turn to start. Leed Whalen! Any Whalen was anathema to a Reed. Blood had been spilled between Reeds and Whalens, and back in the fund of Benjamin's recollections of life up the mountain were many black curses on his father's pulpy lips against the family. Suddenly Benjamin straightened his mouth grimly and fell back to his duties. He had come all this distance, through a haggard and worn country, at night, forlorn, his heart still bleeding from the loss of his daddy, to be shed forever of hates and feuds and killings. It were not meet that he fatten now on the foolishness which must always make lean frames of those who ate the fruit of hatred. He made the dust fly, while the girl turned back inside the screen door of the grocery.

During the day he deposited his money in the bank. Old Rattlesnake Reed had always been suspicious of banks.

"They're apt to bust," he always said. "If they don't bust, somebody's apt to run off with yur money."

So Rattlesnake did his banking with the loose brick on the hearth, or the cashier of the hair trunk. It was natural that Benjy

should live up to his traditions. He kept his thousand, less the cost of two dozen bananas, in his pocket until a better place occurred to his mind.

At noon, when Myrtie came from school, she found him counting over his cash in the lull of trade.

"Horrors!" she exclaimed. "That's not your money, is it?"

"Why, yes." He said it as if to mean, "Why not?"

"Boy!" she added earnestly, "you'd better put that in the bank!" She did not add, "If you expect to keep it long!" Her tone and manner implied that.

"The bank is apt to bust," rejoined Benjy quietly. "If hit don't bust, somebody air apt to run off with the money. Then whur'd I be?"

Myrtie had a hearty laugh, and a keen insight into human behavior. The two qualities functioned together now, and Benjy gazed uncomfortably into a pretty face torn to atoms with joy at his naive way. In a moment, seeing how she was hurting him with her ridicule, she corrected herself.

"Benjy, you said yourself, this morning, that you were sick of all the ways of the upper hills. Keeping money the way you are is the method of the upper hills. Folks don't do it that way down here. Just as soon as I eat a bite of lunch, we'll run up to the bank and put this money of yours on deposit. It won't 'bust,' that is, it's not likely to; and I know the cashier. He's a cousin of mine. He won't run off with it."

An hour later Benjy had put his money in the bank.

That evening, after school, the girl came into the rear of the store, sitting on a high stool at the cashier's desk, and while Benjy obeyed her orders in dusting stock, waiting on a few customers who were not exacting as to promptness, he learned that she was sixteen years old; that she was in the first year of high school and liked it; that she liked him and had hopes he would learn to be a good store clerk; while she learned in turn that Benjy could read proficiently, and liked it; that he did not chew, drink, or cuss.

"Maw," he said simply, "teeched me not to do them things. So I never done them."

"*Taught* you not to do *those* things," corrected Myrtie sweetly. "And you never *did* them."

THAT night, late, Leed Whalen returned. It was past closing time in the store, but Myrtie was still up, instructing the new grocer boy in his duties. Old Beasley had gone home. It had been arranged, seeing that the boy, whose place Benjy took, had boarded and lodged with the proprietor upstairs over the store, that the new boy should do the same.

Benjamin saw a bulky man, mudstained, battered, come glaring, growling, through the screen doors. He staggered slightly from side to side, as if he had scant sleep, and was down in his mind. He carried a clay-stained bundle.

"Whut the damnation—" he started to say, evidently not understanding why the store was open so late.

Myrtie started up with a little cry.

"Why, Dad! What's the matter—"

Whalen stopped in front of Benjamin.

"Who's this?" he demanded.

Benjamin stiffened instinctively. His strong youthful eyes looked straight into the shifting, passion-stirred eyes of this mud bespattered, haggard man. But for a swift, soft hand on his arm, Benjy might have met the antagonistic glare with atavistic belligerency.

"Don't mind him—he's tired and worn out!" she whispered. "Daddy," she explained, turning to her father, "This is Benjamin Reed—"

Whalen did a curious thing. His eyes seemed to come out of his head; his big hand went to his brow. He staggered back a step, then his boarlike body lunged forward. Benjamin saw his big fists double.

He did not understand anything about it, but somehow the girl's keener intuition grasped something underlying the action. She took him quickly by the arm, half dragging her parent to the rear of the store, where the stairway led above.

"He's all right, Daddy," Benjamin heard her talking fast, definitely. "I hired him. He'll make a good hand. I know he's a Reed. But we need him. Daddy!" she continued protesting. "Come on, I say!" She contrived to get him through the stair door. Inside her voice was muffled, but she was still talking rapidly, and straight to the point. "—took it to the bank, I tell you!" he caught the conclusion of a sentence that apparently had to be driven home with emphasis to preclude some move contrary to her wishes.

A silence suddenly filled all the room about Benjamin. The girl and her father had stopped somewhere on the stairs. Now their footsteps, muffled, commenced again. They were ascending. Benjy gave a sigh of relief. Evidently it had been agreed in that brief interval that he was to hold his job. Such a decision was of weighty moment to him. Somehow he felt it meant the fruits of civilization, the good food of peace, which he had hungered for so long.

He watched Whalen closely all the next day. In the morning the man was out. "He's killing beef at the slaughter house," old Beasley replied to Benjy's question. "You see, he goes up in the hills and buys cattle on foot, then fotches 'em down here and butchers 'em and sells the meat here in the market."

But during the afternoon he had ample opportunity to study his boss, and Whalen he found to be a taciturn, growlish sort of man. Most of the time he remained in the rear of the grocery, cutting steaks. Once or twice Benjamin caught the man covertly studying him, and in spite of himself he could not bring himself to be trustful of the future. Why was it, he asked himself over and over, that hatred, feudism, boils so long in the blood? All he knew of Whalen was that Whalen was a Whalen. The man, to one without a grudge against the Whalen tribe, would have been simply an honest country butcher, with a pretty nice little store, and a fair trade—a man who was gradually growing prosperous, and might eventually hope to achieve a degree of riches in case he could keep his business going until he had established a good trade.

But Benjamin saw only a Whalen. To him the name was poison. For his daddy had always said that no Whalen that ever saw issue ought to be spared hell. In fact, old Rattlesnake had a saying that God permitted Whalens to be born so that the devil might expect a steady income in his business!

But when Benjamin looked at Myrtie, he determined to stick to his job. The old man might be a Whalen—was one, in fact; but Myrtie was something else. Vaguely Benjamin felt she must be an angel.

So the days drifted into weeks, and the first month went its way. Gradually his distrust of the proprietor diminished, passed away. The lion and the lamb had lain down together, and mutually found their company not uncongenial. Although Benjamin could not bring himself quite to love Whalen, he at least could tolerate the ancient feudal enemy. Certainly that was stretching the frail thread of human nature a long way.

One evening he found himself alone in the store with Whalen. Darkness had come; the customers had all gone. The proprietor came out of his meat shop and approached Benjamin where he was replacing canned goods up front.

"Been wanting to talk to you several days, Benjy," the boss began.

Benjamin looked at him closely. There was a new note in Whalen's voice, an unaccustomed phlegm. The man's eyes, however, shifted about, resting upon everything except Benjamin.

"Yes, several days. You've been here with me now quite awhile. Six weeks, ain't it? Long enough, anyhow, for you to see how the business is going. It looks like in time I might make it into a real paying thing. Ain't that so, Benjy?"

"I've been thinking that myself."

"I was satisfied that a smart young fellow like you would see that, Benjy. Now, let me make a proposition to you. You got a little money—close to a thousand dollars, ain't it—b'lieve that's whut Myrtie said. Well, here's my proposition: Invest that money here in the store with me. You'll be my partner. We're sure to make money. You can see that. How about it, Benjy?"

Benjamin's heart skipped a beat. He and an old enemy becoming business partners! But aside from the sentimental side of it, it looked like a good thing. Benjamin had not learned all about the grocery and market business in six weeks. But he did have a good head, and Myrtie was a good teacher. The girl had taught him a deftness that no association except with her could have brought to him. His instinctive capacity for trading told him here was his opportunity.

"All right, Mr. Whalen," he agreed.

"That's fine, Benjy!" Whalen slapped him on the back. "A little later on, mebby —Whalen and Reed! Sounds good, eh? We'll get everything fixed up first thing in the morning?"

Benjamin nodded. Then Whalen set about closing up the store for the night.

The following day Benjamin transferred nine hundred dollars of his money to Whalen, taking nothing more binding than a promissory note. It seemed sufficient to the boy. He knew little of legal matters in such circumstances; he went to no trouble to inquire where he felt satisfied, as he did here.

SHORTLY after this incident, again late at closing time—which seemed to become an eventful hour for Benjamin, his brother Neal came groping along the nearly deserted night sidewalk. At first Benjamin thought he was a negro hobo. He looked with amazement upon the haggard features of his eldest brother. Neal looked as if he had been through the mill, and must still be grist to more rocks before he was bolted.

Benjamin knew trouble had been astir far up the mountain. But he was not prepared to learn how terribly near home it had got.

"Me and the boys scoured the hull damn woods the night paw was shot," Neal said, looking about him and then opening a cracker can and removing a fistful. "We never could come up with that fellow that done the killing. We hemmed him once, fur down in Ludlow's cave country thar, and shot his hoss. We found hit war Lud Kimmins' hoss, all right. So me and the boys, we hopped our nags, and went over Hongry Ridge to Lud's cabin. And thar we lingered, and filled that place so full of lead that a skeeter couldn't have lived through hit."

He ate crackers meditatively.

"Then we went in," he finally concluded. "Thar wa'n't nothin' thar but Kimmins' wife and baby. They war dead."

He ate another cracker, Benjamin, memories bleak upon him, watching the curious workings of his brother's brutal face. It might have been that this brutish man, mountainous of girth, arms like mauls, big boned and worthy in all respects except brains and soul, was talking about the weather.

"In the maintime the other boys got on the trail of the feller we thought war Lud, and kept running hit hot. They liked once to have hemmed him. But somehow he slipped away from the boys. Then we run amuck of a passel of the Kimmins' mob, had a big fight thar in Hatchee Cove, and whenst we got done, Bub, Mack, and Hargrove war killed." He stopped again. But he manifested no emotion at the loss of three brothers. "Benjy," he started again, after a moment, "Lud Kimmins never killed pap. Fur we found Lud knocked in the head, fur over on Peewee, stripped of his hat and coat, and dead three days!"

Benjamin saw scant significance in this news compared with the grief at loss of his brothers.

"What about the other boys, Neal?" he begged.

Neal finished chewing the rest of the crackers, then methodically dusted the cracker crumbs out of his eight days' stubble. He coughed, gulping twice to make the dry mass go down.

"Fust and last, in one fight and another," Neal said, with the peaceful mien of one cow watching another cow die, "only me and you and Buck air travelin'!"

"My God!" Benjamin suddenly crumpled down and commenced to sob. "All gone—all of us dead and gone!" he moaned feebly.

Neal coughed again—from cracker dust in his windpipe.

"Sissy!" he sputtered. He rose. "Ham Weakly shot Sel last night. I air going up thar this night and kill him!"

He sauntered towards the door. At the screens he turned.

"You hain't seen Buck in these parts anywhars, has you?"

Benjamin looked up quickly. "No," he said. "Why? Is he around in here anywhere?"

"You'd hardly know the pore boy. One of them damn Kimmins' shot at Buck, and taken him jist back of the ear—didn't kill him, jist sorter knocked him cold. We doctored him up one side and down the other, and fetched him around all right. But he ain't very bright since. Runs off. Sel war watching of him, but when Sel got done up, Buck run off. I thought mebby he mout have strayed down yer sommers. Wal," opening the door and passing into the night, "I'll be seeing of you later. Buck's got him a pistol, and makes out he's runnin' in a dream the feller whut killed pap. I want to find him fo' he hurts himself."

When his brother was gone, Benjamin fell into a mournful reverie. How bitter had life dealt with him. It was true that

he had never felt a genuine affection for his brothers. They were too unlike himself; too brutal, too cold and bloody-souled. The harsh mountains had inured them to so many of the finer traits of humanity that often they had seemed to him as brutes and beasts. Yet they were of his blood, and he of theirs. With fuller capacity for affection, he could not despise them, whatever they might be. With all of them dead in the bitter mountain vendetta, only Neal, the coldest of them all, and crazed Buck, the weakest of them all, remaining, he grieved deeply. He went up to bed, but he did not sleep. He spent a tumbling night, and came out of bed jaded and drawn.

"Daddy's gone up in the hills to buy cattle," Myrtie told him, as he tried to eat breakfast.

"He was up there just last week," countered Benjamin, surprised at the news. He knew that Whalen had other plans for the day.

"All the same, he left out before day this morning. He came by my room door and said he was going to buy cattle, and for us to go ahead about things just as if he were here."

Benjamin went down and opened up the store, and started sweeping out. Shortly Myrtie came downstairs, her books under her arm. Mrs. Whalen was away from home, on a two-weeks' visit. Except for the competent Beasley, who attended the slack trade, he was alone in the establishment.

Some premonition pursued him. He tried to work it off, but soon the duties in the store were completed. He betook himself upstairs to press his suit for the coming Sunday. That was as good a way to kill time as any. Back in his brain was a turmoil of sensations, memories, feelings.

The electric iron was not in its accustomed place on the pantry shelf in the kitchenette, and he began to search afield. At length he pilfered through the closet containing the adult members' clothing. Suddenly his eye stopped, riveted on a blue coat! On the front of it was a missing button, with a patch of cloth torn away!

That button Benjamin still carried in his pocket. Now he snatched it out. There could be no mistake! The cloth fitted and matched. And the coat belonged to Lud Kimmins. He had seen the garment that Sunday; he had looked at it closely, for new clothes in the mountains were sufficient to command absolute and unmistakable attention. His brother's words came back to him: "We found Lud knocked in the head, fur over on Peewee, stripped of his hat and coat."

Frantically Benjamin worked now in his search. In an old pasteboard box he unearthed the hat!

"Whalen killed pap!"

Benjamin stood frozen, staring. Civilization had not changed the hound in the dog. That old feud had festered, cankered, in Whalen's soul. He had probably had a fight with Lud Kimmins, and killed him. How he found out that Luck Stepens was to come by the gate and call for old Rattlesnake Reed, Benjamin could only conjecture. But it was a crafty scheme to put a murder off on a dead man.

SOMETHING in Benjy's soul snapped. The timidity that had always kept him nailed to a sissiness died in the face of the tragedy of his family's passing; of the picture of a woman and baby dead in a cabin high up on Hongry Ridge. He raised his gaunt arms high above his head, but when they fell they did so not with a gesture of hopelessness, but with fists doubled.

Benjamin got his gun, and took the steps two at a time down into the store. He pulled his hat on as he went out. In the alley back of the store stood the delivery truck. He knew the backland trail Whalen followed in his trips up the mountain. At Little Big Falls of the Peewee he could intercept the cow buyer if he pushed the machine. He pushed it!

The sunshine cut at an acute angle when he reached the place of the falls. He examined the trail. No one on horseback had been along there this morning. Benjamin hid behind a bush. Thirty minutes later a horseman scrumbled the rocks up the trail out of the cedars. The boy stepped out. His gun was pointed from the hip—the instinctive sight of the born shot.

"I air going to kill you!" he told Whalen. "I jist found out you shot my pap. And you swindled me out of my money! And all the time I thought that the good things down thar—" he nodded his head back down into the valley, where the town lay hidden in the folds of the peidmont—

"would make a man good! They hain't never done hit! They've made you worse. And they've made me worse. I air going to shoot yur damn guts out!"

Whalen started to plead.

"What you mean, Benjy? W'y, you don't honestly mean—"

"Come off that hoss!"

Whalen slid from the saddle.

"If you got anything to say—"

The snort of a hot motor filled the waiting stillness. A moment later a Ford stopped around the boulders, and Myrtie leaped out. Her eyes glinted, and they looked down the weapon that Whalen kept by the cash drawer.

"You put that gun down, Benjy!" she commanded. "If you don't—"

"Thar hain't nothin' in civilization," said Benjy bitterly, "but a snare and a delusion!"

His gun came down as Whalen's hands slowly lowered.

*Spang!* snarled a metallic spittle of sound. Whalen sank softly to the ground. Both Benjamin and the girl fell apart, startled.

The shot had come from just back of them. They turned to look. A croak of foolish laughter cut the high stillness of the glorious morning; a blundering idiotic form darted off into the scraggly brush. Benjamin needed no second look for identification. It was the crazed Buck.

Instinctively his eyes focused on Myrtie. She stood poised, misty-eyed, inadequate, as human beings so often are in moments of deep stress. She tottered, staggering gently towards him. Atavism—that bloody return to the brute—was gone from both alike. And when she fell, it was into his arms.

## *A New Humorist for Everybody's*

*Thomas Thursday makes his bow to you in this issue with "Westward Ho! Kum!" Next month we'll publish his "West Goes South," and in November, "The Dumb Wonder." The editor's one hope is that you'll enjoy these stories as much as he did.*

# *Everybody's* Meeting PLACE

*Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion*

ETHICS AND EDITORS

FOR a long time editors were supposed to be very aloof persons living in a rarefied atmosphere of their own creation. But I think times have changed in that respect as in so many others. Certainly if aloofness be an editorial ethic I want none of it.

I like to talk to you, EVERYBODY'S readers, in these pages just as if, in a particularly confidential mood, we were sitting at dinner together. The great handicap is that I have to do all the talking which is a serious drawback. Your answers come in weeks after this chatter of mine has been delivered.

But the other evening I had the pleasure of meeting a man at dinner who, I soon discovered, was a reader of EVERYBODY'S and quite an enthusiastic one.

He'd just finished reading the July issue and, although I tried to pretend a decent amount of modesty, I pounced eagerly upon every scrap of praise he threw the magazine.

In the July issue he particularly liked E. van Lier Ribbink's novelette of Africa, *Beast of the Bosveld* and, of course, I ate that up because I particularly liked it myself.

"What impressed me about it was that it seemed so authentic, it seemed to give such a vivid first-hand impression of the country," he said.

"Of course it's authentic," I answered. "Didn't I tell you in 'Everybody's Meeting Place' it was?"

Then he handed me a body blow. "Oh, I don't read 'Everybody's Meeting Place'," said he, in an off-hand manner.

Maybe he was joshing me, however, because a little later he turned to me and said something that made up for the slam.

"You fellows are really doing a worthwhile job and an educational job. Some people don't take fiction seriously but what, better than authentic fiction, brings people in one part of the country to a knowledge of the customs and manners and thoughts of people in another part of the country—or another part of the world for that matter. If international good fellowship ever be established, I, for one, am willing to give writers of good fiction a generous share of the credit for it."

After that, a pleasant evening was had

by all and especially by one rather amateurish, unethical editor who was thus sent on his way tremendously cheered up.

### WHAT'S YOUR VERDICT?

LAST month I made an exceedingly rash statement in these pages. I said this September issue was to be the best new EVERYBODY'S published so far. Now, a little tremblingly, I await your verdict.

But really, let's examine what we have. Several men, who are writing regularly for EVERYBODY'S contribute what I consider absolutely their best work—ARED WHITE'S war story, CAPTAIN DINGLE'S sea story, WILLIAM CORCORAN'S Western novelette—surely, they're all high rater marks from their pens.

And among the newcomers I, for one, am willing to set up a loud cheer for T. T. FLYNN'S novelette, *Tin in the Jungle.*

Here is what Flynn writes me:

T. T. stands for Thomas Theodore, which is too much for any chap to hook on the front of his name. I wasn't born in Cork, Ireland. I'll admit to the Irish strain tho, proud of it! Born and raised in Indianapolis, Indiana. Decided to be a writer all my life and set out to see how much experience I could gather. I've done a little bit of everything including 'hitting the grit', or hoboing if one must be literary; shipyards, steel mills, house-to-house selling, travelling salesman, carpenter, clerk, followed the sea on deck and in the engine and firerooms, worked in railroad shops and as a locomotive inspector, was a partner in a wholesale candy manufacturing business, and a string of other things that would be boresome to relate. I believe a fiction writer deals with life as a whole, and he or she should know it from all angles.

At present I'm living in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Where I'll be six months from now I don't know myself.

I have only one envy—I'd like to loll back in an easy office chair for a month and dispense gloom and terror to the poor authors of the land, and good fiction to the deserving readers.

### THE PAPAGOS AND THEIR COUNTRY

A STORY the locale of which was new to me is ERNEST DOUGLAS'S *Whippoorwill House.* I wrote and asked him if there were any such legends of the Southwest as his story suggested and probably putting me down as an ignoramus, he answered:

Whippoorwill House is a patchwork of actualities and author's imagination. No doubt some who think they know the Papago country will pronounce it farfetched; but stranger things have happened among the mountains and deserts of Southwestern Arizona, where I was born.

The Papagos are a nomandic tribe of Piman stock, without any central head, and roam over a desert region larger than many eastern states. There are many villages like the one described. The temple, of course, is an invention; but something like it may easily exist. It is more or less founded upon our historic Casa Grande ruin, situated only a few miles from where I now live.

The Indians of the present day have scores of legends of the ho-ho-kum (literally, those who died) and the ruins they left behind them as mementoes of an earlier and more advanced civilization. Not infrequently they regard the ancient relics with superstitious veneration.

These legends, of course, vary from locality to locality. But one curious fancy which is quite general is that the arrow-heads left by the ancients were made by lightning. This seems to persist while other primitive beliefs are rapidly dying out.

Mark Starr might be any of a dozen young Papagoes whom I have known, proud of their white man educations and scornful of the faiths of their fathers. I have long wondered how deep their veneer of civilization might be. Much musing upon that question led me to a conclusion that may be read in *Whippoorwill House.*

### A REAL HUMORIST

I'M ALSO introducing to you in this issue a new humorist—that is new only to EVERYBODY'S because he's had his work published in other magazines for years. I refer, of course, to THOMAS THURSDAY and his story *Westward Ho! Kum!* There's a title for you, too!

Of himself Mr. Thursday writes:

I trust that at least a few of EVERYBODY'S many readers will believe me when I say that my correct name is Thomas Thursdey, and not a nom de fiction. Please note the 'e' in Thursdey; but since most folks insist on spelling it the same way it appears upon calendars, what can I do against the multitude? And so I obligingly spell it like the fifth day of the week, and let the quips fall where they may.

I write yarns of the circus and side-show because that is the life I know best. What's more important, I get paid for 'em. Strange as it may appear to some literary gents, I write chiefly for money instead of fame, glory, pats-on-the-back, and such innocuous pishposh. When the landlords and merchants believe in art for art's sake, I'll also go in for the stuff, and perhaps publish a few gems in Mencken's *American Mercury.* To my mind—if any—the chief difference between a highbrow magazine and a low-brow one is mostly imagination. Will some one in this audience prove to me that Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is anything more than a corking dime novel? That is to say, a very well-written dime-novel? Take that same classic and place it in the hands of, say, Thomas Thursday, and you can bet your undershirt that the way he'd write it

would guarantee its demise in twenty minutes. And if his version were accepted by EVERYBODY'S the editor wouldst be canned for buying it.

I find it just as hard to write a poor story as a good one—so I write neither. Speaking of stories, mine are supposed to be humorous. (Chorus by readers: "Thanks for the tip; we've been puzzled about that point for years.")

I spend my money and winters in Florida—the Chin Whisker of America—and my summers in Maine, the National Icebox. Born in Nyack, New York—a slab on the Hudson—in 1897, and since all professional humorists are supposed to go around with sad faces, I won't spoil the illusion by saying I'm different.

Let me give you the good news that I've got a story from THURSDAY for the October issue, a third for the November issue and so on *ad infinitum*. That is, *ad infinitum* as far as I'm concerned and unless some moneyed monster like the *Saturday Evening Post* comes along and gobbles him up.

PRAISE FOR DINGLE

CAPTAIN DINGLE'S novel, *Flying Kestrel*, is receiving a lot of praise from the critics. It appeared, you'll remember, and I hope you do remember, in EVERYBODY'S recently. And since then the Captain has contributed several short stories to EVERYBODY'S—*Roll and Go*, in this issue, is one of them. But the point just now is the critics think the Captain's good!

Here, for instance, is part of the full-column review Harry Hansen, one of the ablest critics in the country, gave *Flying Kestrel* in the *New York World:*

Nobody need consult a nautical dictionary to discover that Capt. Dingle has tasted salt spray. He wields a typewriter like a man on the dog watch of a newspaper, but for all that he knows his ship from foreyards to topgallants. *Flying Kestrel* is Capt. Dingle's latest bid for popularity, and if you want a good sea yarn it's your choice, as it is mine.

There are times when tales like *Flying Kestrel* are a life-line thrown to a drowning man. Similarly, I suppose, J. S. Fletcher and Louis Joseph Vance have brought men back to life after a deluge of work; certainly Rafael Sabatini is held in veneration by thousands of staid and inaccessible financiers for that very reason. Capt. Dingle now joins that merry throng of entertainers, especially when he is not engaged in citing the dimensions of deep-sea craft but telling you how fast they can travel before the wind.

*Flying Kestrel* has one or two qualities that make it an admirable sea yarn. It has speed—not alone is it a story of a great sailing ship beating her own record but it moves along with no dull passages. And it communicates something of the wild and untamed life of the sea, so that reading it becomes just a trifle of a hazard.

In plot *Flying Kestrel* presents certain elements that are a bit familiar but none the less welcome. There is Orson, the tough and hard-boiled owner, so tough that he has to maul a crew of jailbirds every time he puts to sea, and almost every man of them is ready to jump the ship the moment she touches land. There are the usual attempts to kill the skipper on the part of disgruntled members of the crew; there are the bad food and the hard work and the leaky hull to make men grumble.

In addition there is the lady in the cabin—in fact in this tale there are two of her, both shanghaied; the first a hot-tempered dark girl seashore at San Francisco; the second, fair-haired Nancy Prouse, who learned to love the skipper. But of that, as the story tellers used to say, more anon.

But there is one element in the story that is vital—and that is the ship. After reading this tale you must admit that Capt. Dingle knows sailing ships.

And just as he has named the book after the *Kestrel*, so he has made her the reason for telling the story.

IN CONCLUSION

HERE I am stranded with no space left and I want to tell you something about the October issue.

For one thing, we start publication of *The Desert Moon Mystery*—a story that combines the lure of a mysterious murder and genuine characterization. The scene is a Western ranch of today. And neither I nor any of the rest of the staff of EVERYBODY'S could solve the mystery until the author, very deftly, chose to reveal it.

Another feature I think you'll like is a group of three stories by RAYMOND S. SPEARS—*Three Tales from the Life of the Old West*. When I first read these, they seemed so real I didn't know whether Mr. Spears was writing fact or fiction. When I asked him, he replied they were fiction based on fact.

And there'll be other tales by such well-known writers for EVERYBODY'S as ARED WHITE and CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS.

And now, listen, I'm tired of doing all the talking at this dinner. Suppose you come across with a remark or two in a letter. Unless, like that man I met at dinner, you, too, don't read, and don't like, these casual mutterings of

O. G.

## THE NEWS OF NEXT MONTH

Beginning

# *The* Desert Moon Mystery

By KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

An absolutely enthralling story of murder on a Western ranch. The mystery is a real mystery which we'll wager you won't guess until the last installment. Another merit of the story is that the characters are genuine, human and interesting. It held us nervous and excited until the conclusion—and so we believe will it you.

### *Another Unusual Feature*

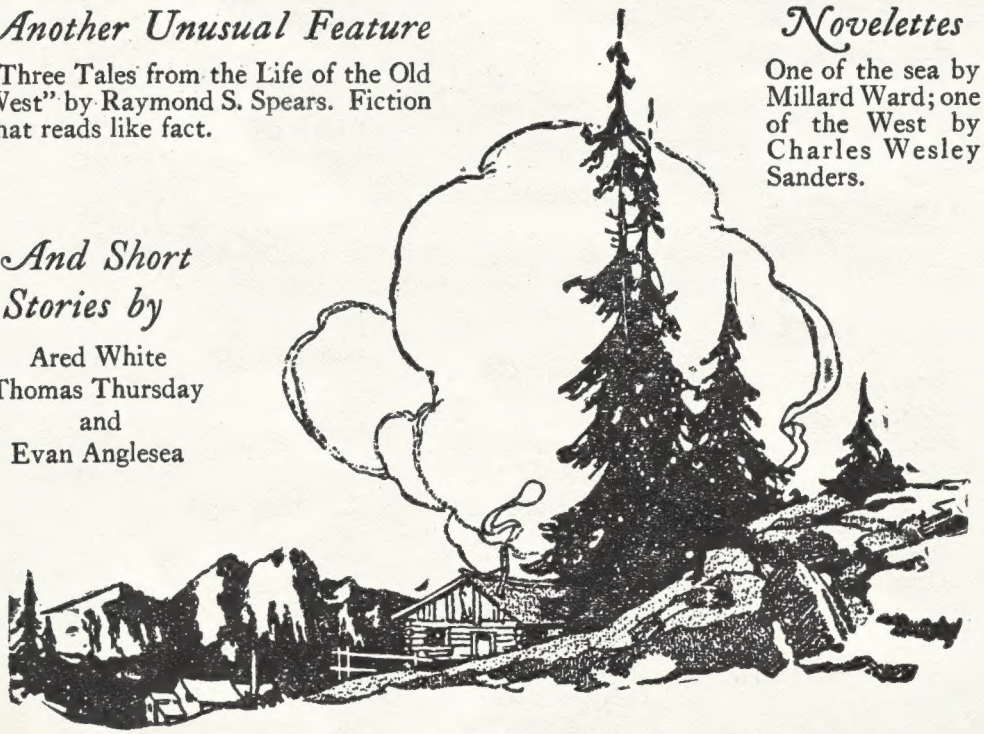
"Three Tales from the Life of the Old West" by Raymond S. Spears. Fiction that reads like fact.

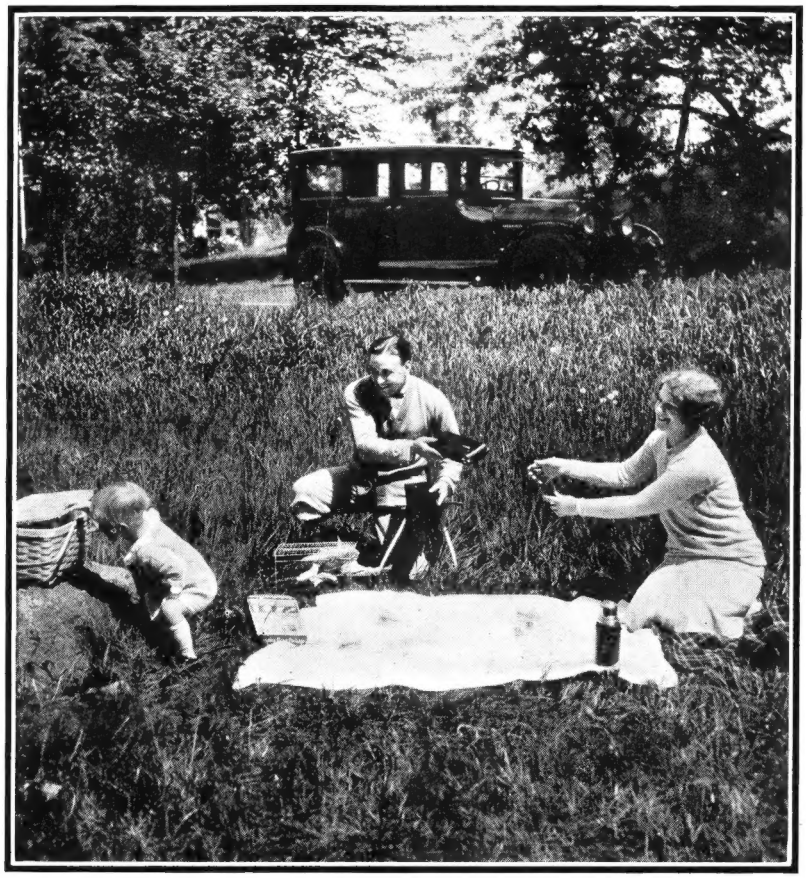
### *Novelettes*

One of the sea by Millard Ward; one of the West by Charles Wesley Sanders.

### *And Short Stories by*

Ared White
Thomas Thursday
and
Evan Anglesea





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